

## Ebola disease

### **Ebola is an infectious disease caused by a virus (filovirus)**

Ebola is an infectious disease caused by a virus (filovirus). It was first recognised in 1976 when two outbreaks were reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, near the Ebola River, and in South Sudan.

Since then, sporadic outbreaks have been reported Central and West Africa. Major epidemics, with large case numbers requiring an international humanitarian effort have occurred in West Africa (2014-2016) and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (2018 – 2019).

Ebola virus is rare and UK Health Security Agency advises risk of Ebola infection is [a negligible to very low risk to the United Kingdom \(UK\)](#).

Ebola virus is spread by close, direct physical contact with infected body fluids: blood, faeces, saliva, semen, urine and vomit. Infected people can only spread the virus to other people when they have symptoms.

Infection causes a serious, often fatal haemorrhagic (bleeding) illness called Ebola disease (EBOD). Symptoms usually begin suddenly and include fever, headache, joint and muscle pain, sore throat and weakness. Internal and external bleeding; blood in faeces, extensive bruising, bleeding gums, liver and kidney failure can also occur.

There is currently no licensed treatment, care is supportive and recovery depends on early care and treatment of symptoms. A number of vaccines and treatments are being developed.

Check our [Country Information pages](#) for destination specific news and outbreaks.

### **Prevention**

UK travellers planning to visit areas with EBOD outbreaks or reporting isolated cases should consider their trip plans carefully, in consultation with a travel health specialist.

All travellers to Ebola risk areas should:

- Avoid anyone with symptoms.
- Avoid contact with blood and body fluids and any items that may have been contaminated with blood and body fluids, like clothes, bedding or medical equipment.
- Avoid contact with animals, especially bats and non-human primates (monkeys, baboons, chimpanzees).
- Follow safer sex advice - always use condoms.
- Do not eat, cook or prepare any type of raw or wild meat (bushmeat) or any meat from unknown sources.
- Always wash and peel fruit and vegetables carefully.
- Follow good food, water and personal hygiene advice, including careful, regular hand washing with soap and water (or alcohol gel if soap is unavailable).

- If attending a funeral, mourners should avoid all contact with the deceased, their body fluids and their personal property.

Some traditional burial rituals may play a part in the spread of Ebola. The World Health Organization has guidance on [safe and dignified burials](#) to help prevent Ebola transmission in these circumstances.

Aid workers and health professionals planning to undertake humanitarian work in areas where outbreaks or isolated EBOD cases are reported should seek risk assessment advice and training from their employer/organisation prior to travel. They should also be familiar with UK Health Security Agency specific guidance: [Information for Ebola response workers](#) and the [Ebola and Marburg: returning workers scheme](#).

Travel to an Ebola affected area may restrict travel health insurance options. Travellers should discuss their plans with their [travel insurance](#) provider before they go.

UK travellers experiencing symptoms aboard should seek local medical advice as soon as possible.

Travellers who become unwell after returning to the UK should ring their GP for advice or call [NHS 111](#). It is important returning travellers provide details of any recent travel to their health professional so appropriate measures and testing can be carried out. It's extremely unlikely that Ebola will be the cause of fever or other symptoms, but other serious conditions such as malaria or typhoid may be a risk.

More detailed information on [Ebola disease: clinical management and guidance](#) is available on the UK Health Security Agency website.

## Resources

- [NHS: Ebola disease](#)
- [UKHSA: Ebola: overview, history, origins and transmission](#)
- [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Ebola disease basics](#)
- [World Health Organization: Ebola disease](#)