



Who

Ebola virus disease outbreaks may begin after contact with tissue or body fluids of an infected animal. The virus is transmitted when others come into direct contact with blood or other body fluids of the infected person. Family members and those who provide hands-on medical care or help with burial procedures have the highest risk of becoming infected. For non-healthcare workers, the risk is usually low.



What

Ebola virus disease may cause serious, even fatal disease in humans and wild apes, although milder infections may occur. The disease used to be called Ebola hemorrhagic fever. However, the current name better reflects the diversity of the clinical picture, of which major bleeding is seen only in a minority of patients.

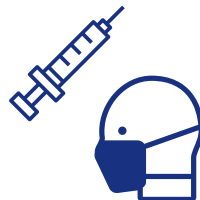


Where and when

The virus was discovered in 1976 in the current Democratic Republic of Congo, along the River Ebola. Since then, outbreaks of Ebola virus disease have occurred in Central Africa, the Sudan and West Africa. The natural reservoir of the virus is unknown, but bats appear to be at least one of the reservoir hosts.

Prevention

Strict infection control measures are essential to prevent transmission. Avoid unprotected contact with blood and/or other body fluids of symptomatic patients. Individuals who have been exposed to Ebola virus should be monitored for 21 days after the last exposure. Several vaccines are tested and some are found to be (partly) effective.



Treatment

The mainstay of treatment of Ebola virus disease involves all necessary supportive care to make sure that all vital organs keep working while the patient's own immune system mobilizes a response to eliminate the infection.

Symptoms

The incubation time ranges from 2-21 days after exposure, in which there is no evidence that patients can transmit the virus to other people. General symptoms include fever, chills, headache, vomiting, lack of appetite, joint and muscle aches and diarrhea. Bleeding signs, shortness of breath and neurological symptoms may occur.



In case of infection

It is essential to make the diagnosis early, to implement infection control procedures and to initiate supportive measures before the development of irreversible shock. Diagnostic tests may detect the virus or viral antigens in the blood or other body fluids.