

Ebola

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

(Updated November 2014)

1. Ebola Virus Disease: What is it?

Ebola is a rare disease caused by infection with Ebola virus. The current Ebola virus outbreak is in three countries in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea.

2. Who is at risk for Ebola?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports those individuals at risk will:

- Have traveled to Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Guinea in the last 21 days **OR**
- Have had contact with a person who has Ebola virus disease in the last 21 days

3. What are the signs and symptoms of Ebola?

(Note: these can also be the symptoms of other diseases and illness)

- Fever (feeling feverish, or a temperature greater than 38.0°C or 100.4°F)
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Weakness
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal (stomach) pain
- Unexplained hemorrhage (bleeding or bruising)

Signs and symptoms may appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure to Ebola, but the average is 8 to 10 days.

4. How is Ebola transmitted?

When an infection does occur in humans, the virus can be spread in several ways to others. Ebola is spread through direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes in, for example, the eyes, nose, or mouth) with:

- blood or body fluids (including but not limited to urine, saliva, sweat, feces, vomit, breast milk, and semen) of a person who is sick with Ebola
- objects (like needles and syringes) that have been contaminated with the virus
- handling clothing or bedding that may contain blood of an infected person

Ebola is **not** spread through the air or by water, or by food. There is no evidence that mosquitos or other insects can transmit Ebola virus.

An infected person cannot spread the disease until symptoms appear

Ebola can only spread when a person infected with the virus has a fever or shows other symptoms. In most cases, it takes 8–10 days for people to show symptoms, but symptoms can appear in as little as 2 days and as many as 21 days after being exposed.

5. Can individuals recover from Ebola?

While Ebola infection can be fatal, persons are able to recover from Ebola. Recovery from Ebola depends on good supportive clinical care and the patient's immune response. People who recover from Ebola infection develop antibodies that last for at least 10 years.

6. Which U.S. airports are passengers being screened?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Department of Homeland Security Custom and Border Patrol now screen 100 percent of travelers from the three countries (Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea) that have the current Ebola outbreak. Sick travelers will be hospitalized, those who are not sick are monitored by state and local health officials when they arrive back to their home state/or place where they are visiting for the 21 day incubation period. In Connecticut, the local health department consults with epidemiological experts at DPH and the decision to require movement restrictions to prevent further risk is decided on a case by case basis.

7. How do I protect myself against Ebola?

You are not at risk unless you have recently traveled to an area where there has been an outbreak of Ebola or had direct contact with someone with Ebola. There is very low risk of Ebola to the general public. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ask that the U.S. public avoid unnecessary travel to West African countries currently affected by Ebola (Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone).

The same common sense methods that protect against the flu or other common illnesses can protect you from Ebola in the (extremely unlikely) case you are exposed to someone with Ebola:

- Wash hands frequently or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid contact with blood and body fluids of any person, particularly someone who is sick.
- Do not handle items that may have come in contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids, including clothing or sheets.

8. Do we have cases of Ebola in Connecticut?

We have not had any cases in Connecticut.

9. What is Connecticut doing to prevent Ebola in our state?

The State of Connecticut has taken several steps to protect residents to control the spread of the Ebola virus if there are confirmed cases of the disease:

- Governor Malloy signed an executive order allowing the Public Health Commissioner to quarantine a person or group of people exposed to or infected with the Ebola virus.
- The DPH and local health departments actively monitor the health of any person at risk: anyone who has been in Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Guinea in the past 21 days, and anyone known to have been exposed to a person with Ebola.
- DPH is working with hospitals and the health care system to make sure they are ready to identify, protect and treat patients infected with Ebola.
- Governor Malloy convened a Unified Command Team (UCT) to make sure the state works together and the public stays informed.

10. How prepared are CT hospitals and healthcare system to deal with a real Ebola case?

State, federal and local agencies have been preparing for a possible Ebola case since early August. All hospitals completed an Ebola preparedness checklist to DPH, which includes safety measures for caring for a patient as well as protecting healthcare workers with personal protective equipment. The Governor directed all hospitals to complete a safety test drill by Friday, October 18th. All hospitals complied with this directive. Healthcare workers and hospitals have been receiving ongoing communications from DPH on state and CDC updates to ensure that they are ready to respond to a suspect case.

11. Which CT hospitals are designated to care for Ebola patients? Is there a particular subset of hospitals to which symptomatic, at-risk individuals should be referred?

At this time, no acute care hospitals in the state that have been specifically designated to care for Ebola patients. Any hospital may receive an Ebola patient and all Connecticut acute care hospitals have taken steps to be prepared should a suspect patient present at their hospital. All hospitals conducted drills to test their ability to identify, isolate, and treat a suspect patient with Ebola.

12. How are Travelers from Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone Monitored?

Federal authorities are notifying DPH of travelers from the countries affected through the enhanced entry screening program at airports. DPH works with local health officials to obtain detailed information about the person's travel history and potential exposures, and determines the necessary steps to protect the public's health. At a minimum, local health officials will contact individuals daily to obtain their temperatures and determine whether they have developed any symptoms of illness for 21 days. Some people who have traveled to affected areas may have their movement restricted and/or be confined to one location.

13. What should you know about hosting a visitor from West Africa?

By the time your visitors arrive from Sierra Leone, Guinea, or Liberia, they will have been through health screenings in both the airport they departed from in West Africa, and again when they landed in the United States. If they had any symptoms of Ebola when they arrived in the US, they would have been sent to a hospital. All other travelers will have their health monitored for 21 days. For travelers who are considered to be at a high risk of getting the disease, they would also be required to comply with movement restrictions.

14. What is Quarantine and Isolation?

Quarantine and Isolation help protect the public by preventing exposure to people who have or may have a contagious disease.

QUARANTINE means that you are not sick, but are kept away from other people because you may have been exposed to an infectious or contagious disease. If you are in quarantine and become sick, you will not infect anyone else and prompt medical treatment can be arranged for you.

ISOLATION is when you are kept away from other people because you are sick (or there is reason to believe you are sick) and can infect other people.

15. How is Ebola treated?

There is no specific medicine or vaccine for Ebola, but there is treatment. It requires the patient to be admitted to the hospital intensive care unit and receive supportive care, such as intravenous fluids. With high quality supportive care the survival rate is much higher than in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea.

16. Can my pets get Ebola?

At this time, there have been no reports of dogs or cats becoming sick with Ebola or of being able to spread Ebola to people or animals. The chances of a dog or cat being exposed to Ebola virus in the U.S. are very low.

17. In my job, I often make home visits to clients. What steps may I take to protect myself from exposure to Ebola?

If you make house calls in the course of your employment, you may wish to ask the following three questions:

1. Has anyone in your household been to Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia in the last 21 days?
2. Have you been exposed to anyone with Ebola in the last 21 days?

If the answer is yes, then call the local health department in the town to discuss the situation.

18. What are the standards for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that should be worn by health care providers or first responders?

The CDC has issued guidance on PPE for first responders and health care professionals, which can be found on the state's Ebola website at www.ct.gov/ebola. The guidance with regard to Ebola preparedness has been evolving and therefore it is important to review the website regularly for any updates. Personal Protection recommendations are available at www.osha.gov

19. Where can I get information on Ebola and Ebola preparedness activities?

The State of Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) web site, www.ct.gov/ebola, has information for the public, health care providers, first responders and other government entities. Guidance from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other sources is regularly being updated as Ebola response is evolving, so it is important to check the site frequently. If you have an additional question, you may dial the 2-1-1 Infoline.