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## SAFETY AND HEALTH TOPICS

# Ebola

## Introduction

Ebola hemorrhagic fever (EHF) (sometimes called Ebola Virus Disease, or EVD) is the disease caused by infection with an Ebola virus. It is a type of viral hemorrhagic fever (VHF) brought on by any of several strains of viruses in the Ebolavirus genus. Ebola viruses are capable of causing severe, life-threatening disease. Many people who get EHF die from it. Workers performing tasks involving close contact with symptomatic individuals with EHF or in environments contaminated or reasonably anticipated to be contaminated with infectious body fluids are at risk of exposure. These workers may include workers in the healthcare, mortuary and death care, airline, and other travel service industries.

EHF is usually marked by fever, muscle pain, headache, and sore throat. The illness progression includes nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and impaired organ function. In some cases, rash, internal and/or external bleeding, and death may occur.

In areas of Africa where Ebola viruses are common, suspected reservoirs include primate and bat populations. While there are no known animal reservoirs of the disease in the U.S., there is concern related to possible spread of EHF among human populations due to the availability and reach of global travel. Under certain conditions, exposure to just one viral particle can result in development of EHF. Depending on the strain and the individual infected with the disease, EHF may be fatal in 50-90 percent of cases.<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) categorizes Ebola virus as a Category A select agent. This group includes high-priority agents that pose a risk to national security because they can be easily disseminated or transmitted from person to person; result in high mortality rates and have the potential for major public health impact; might cause public panic and social disruption; and require special action for public health preparedness. Because symptoms of EHF may appear consistent with many other illnesses (e.g., influenza, malaria), diagnosis and treatment of EHF could be delayed during an outbreak. Employers must protect their workers from exposure to Ebola virus on the job.

This web page provides information about Ebola viruses and EHF for workers and employers. The web page includes sections on:

- Background, including the origins of Ebola virus and EHF
- Hazard recognition
- Medical information
- Standards for protecting workers from Ebola virus
- Control and prevention of EHF
- Additional resources

## In Focus: Ebola



Frederick A. Murphy/CDC

The Ebola virus, pictured above in the image from a special type of microscope, is the agent that causes Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever (EHF).

## Quick Links

The OSH Act protects workers who complain to their employer, OSHA or other government agencies about unsafe or unhealthful working conditions in the workplace. You cannot be transferred, denied a raise, have your hours reduced, be fired, or punished in any other way because you used any right given to you under the OSH Act. If you have been punished or discriminated against for using your rights, you must file a complaint with OSHA within 30 days of the alleged reprisal for most complaints. No particular form is required to report the discrimination, but you may send a letter, call the OSHA Area Office nearest you, download and send a completed Notice of Whistleblower Complaint Form (OSHA 8-60.1) (PDF\*), or file online using the Online Whistleblower

How do I find out about employer responsibilities and workers'

## rights?

Workers have a right to a safe workplace. The law requires employers to provide their employees with safe and healthful workplaces. The OSHA law also prohibits employers from retaliating against employees for exercising their rights under the law (including the right to raise a health and safety concern or report an injury). For more information see [www.whistleblowers.gov](http://www.whistleblowers.gov) or Workers' rights under the OSH Act.

OSHA can help answer questions or concerns from employers and workers. To reach your regional or area OSHA office, go to the OSHA Offices by State webpage or call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742).

Small businesses may contact OSHA's free On-site Consultation services funded by OSHA to help determine whether there are hazards at their worksites. To contact free consultation services, go to OSHA's On-site Consultation webpage or call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742) and press number 4.

Workers may file a complaint to have OSHA inspect their workplace if they believe that their employer is not following OSHA standards or that there are serious hazards. Workers can file a complaint with OSHA by calling 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), online via eComplaint Form, or by printing the complaint form and mailing or faxing it to the local OSHA area office. Complaints that are signed by a worker are more likely to result in an inspection.

If you think your job is unsafe or if you have questions, contact OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742). Your contact will be kept confidential. We can help. For other valuable worker protection information, such as Workers' Rights, Employer Responsibilities, and other services OSHA offers, visit OSHA's Workers' page.

<sup>1</sup> "NRT Quick Reference Guide: Ebola and Marburg Hemorrhagic Fevers (PDF)," U.S. National Response Team.

## Complaint Form.

- CDC Ebola web page Updated guidance for healthcare workers, including steps for putting on (donning) and removing (doffing) PPE.
- NIOSH Ebola web page. Provides information for employers and workers in healthcare and other industries.
- **NEW** OSHA/NIOSH/EPA Fact Sheet, Safe Handling, Treatment, Transport and Disposal of Ebola-Contaminated Waste (PDF\*), provides guidance for employers and workers on best practices for safe waste handling throughout the waste cycle, from the point of waste generation through final disposition of treated waste products.
- **NEW** OSHA's Fact Sheet, PPE Selection Matrix for Occupational Exposure to Ebola Virus (PDF\*), provides task-based guidance to help employers select appropriate PPE for workers who may be exposed to Ebola virus in a number of higher-risk work settings.
- **NEW** OSHA's Fact Sheet, Cleaning and Decontamination of Ebola on Surfaces (PDF\*) (Spanish (PDF\*)), provides guidance on protecting workers in non-healthcare/non-laboratory settings from exposure to Ebola virus, and from harmful levels of chemicals used for cleaning and disinfection.

## Quick Facts

- Currently, Ebola virus and EHF do not pose a threat to most U.S. workers. However, exposure to the virus or someone with EHF may be more likely in certain sectors, including the healthcare, mortuary/death care, and airline servicing industries.
- At this time, there is not a widespread Ebola outbreak in the U.S. The ongoing outbreak is limited to countries in West Africa.
- Aside from repatriated medical and aid workers being treated for EHF at specialized hospital facilities within the U.S., the U.S. has seen only a limited number of other cases of EHF. At least some of these cases had close contact with an individual who was treated for EHF at a U.S. hospital after arriving in the U.S. from Liberia. Public health officials are working to ensure EHF does not spread within the U.S.
- Ebola is typically spread through contact with body fluids from a living or deceased person or animal with EHF, though some medical and housekeeping tasks may expose workers to aerosolized droplets containing Ebola virus.
- Until a person develops symptoms of EHF, he or she is not considered contagious.
- Employers must take steps to protect their workers from exposure to Ebola virus on the job.

**\*Accessibility Assistance:** Contact OSHA's Directorate of Technical Support and Emergency Management at (202) 693-2300 for assistance accessing PDF materials.

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**\*\*eBooks** - EPUB is the most common format for e-Books. If you use a Sony Reader, a Nook, or an iPad you can download the EPUB file format. If you use a Kindle, you can download the MOBI file format.

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