

I. Ebola Message Maps. 100 series: Basic Questions

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101. What is Ebola?

Shorter answer:

1. *Ebola is a virus that causes Ebola virus disease.*
2. *Ebola spreads by direct contact with an infected person's body fluids or by direct contact with objects (like needles and syringes) that have been contaminated with the virus.*
3. *Treatment to prevent or control the effects of Ebola is the current most effective treatment.*
4. *Early intervention with treatment of symptoms improves survival.*

Longer answer:

1. ***Ebola is a virus that causes Ebola virus disease.***

- Ebola virus causes Ebola virus disease, which is an acute, communicable, and serious illness that is often fatal if untreated.
- In people, Ebola is characterized by a sudden onset of fever, fatigue, muscle pain, headache, and a sore throat.
- Fever, sore throat, muscle pain, headache, and weakness typically start 2 days to 3 weeks after infection, followed by vomiting, diarrhea and rash, and then in some cases bleeding.
- Death, if it occurs, is typically 6 to 16 days after symptoms start.
- People who recover from the disease will be immune from the strain that caused their illness and can help others who are infected with that strain.

2. ***Ebola spreads by direct contact with an infected person's body fluids or by direct contact with objects (like needles and syringes) that have been contaminated with the virus.***

- Body fluids containing Ebola virus may include: blood, saliva, mucus, sweat, urine, feces, vomit, breast milk, and semen.
 - According to the World Health Organization, blood, feces and vomit are the most infectious fluids.
 - The Ebola virus is found in saliva mostly once patients are severely ill.
- There is no evidence of any cases of Ebola spreading through the air by small droplets.
 - The Ebola virus is not spread in the air the same way the flu or the measles virus spreads through the air.
- The virus in blood and body fluids can enter another person's body through broken skin or unprotected mucous membranes like the eyes, nose, or mouth.
- Ebola can be spread through contact with objects that have been contaminated with the virus.
 - A 2007 study in an Ebola treatment facility in Uganda showed no Ebola in samples from 31 surfaces including bed frames, a spit bowl and a used stethoscope (listening device used by healthcare providers).
- Spread of Ebola by water or by food has not been documented.
Note: There is a small chance that Ebola could be spread by handling or eating bush meat (i.e., wild animals hunted for food in Africa). In Africa, Ebola may be spread as a result of handling wild animals or contact with infected bats.

3. *Treatment to prevent or control the effects of Ebola is the current most effective treatment.*

4. *Early intervention with treatment of symptoms improves survival.*

- Treatment is given to a patient to control or relieve side effects.
- Treatment is given to a patient to improve the patient's comfort and quality of life.
- Currently there is no licensed treatment proven to neutralize or kill the virus.
 - No FDA-approved vaccine or medicine (e.g., antiviral drug) is available for Ebola.
 - Several medications and vaccines for Ebola are currently being developed or tested.
- New ways are being tested to use the blood of someone who has recovered.
- Risk of death in previous outbreaks has varied between 25% and 90%, and is currently estimated at 50-60% in the current West African outbreak.

102. Why is the Ebola virus called “Ebola”?

Shorter answer:

1. *The Ebola virus is named after the Ebola River in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire).*
2. *Since 1976, there have been small outbreaks throughout equatorial Africa, typically with small number of cases and short duration.*
3. *There are five different strains of the Ebola virus, named after the areas where they originated.*
4. *Scientists believe that fruit bats may be the natural host of the Ebola virus in Africa, passing on the virus to other animals such as apes and monkeys.*

Longer answer:

1. ***The Ebola virus is named after the Ebola River in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire).***
 - The first outbreak of Ebola occurred in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1976.
 - The current Ebola outbreak in West Africa began in Guinea in December 2013.
2. ***Since 1976, there have been small outbreaks throughout equatorial Africa typically with small number of cases and short duration.***
 - As of 29 October, the current outbreak has lasted nearly 11 months with more than 10,000 cases and nearly 5,000 deaths.
 - Prior to the current outbreak, the largest outbreak of Ebola was in Uganda in 2000 lasting 5 months with 425 cases and 224 deaths.
 - Previous outbreaks were limited to single countries – the current outbreak has affected 8 countries including the United States and Spain.
3. ***There are five different strains of the Ebola virus, named after the areas where they originated.***
 - All five strains of Ebola cause a disease known as “viral hemorrhagic fever,” which is a type of disease that affects multiple organs in the body and is often accompanied by bleeding.
 - Three of the five strains of Ebola have been associated with large outbreaks of viral hemorrhagic fever in Africa.
 - Of the five strains of Ebola, the Zaire strain -- the first to be identified -- is considered the most deadly.
 - Preliminary tests done by the World Health Organization indicate that the current outbreak in West Africa is the Zaire strain of Ebola.
4. ***Scientists believe that fruit bats are the natural carrier of the Ebola virus in Africa, passing on the virus to other animals such as apes and monkeys.***
 - People became infected after contact with the body fluids of infected fruit bats or infected animals.
 - People become infected when the virus enters the body through broken skin or unprotected mucus membranes.

- Outbreaks in Africa spread in areas where hospitals have poor infection control and in areas with limited access to resources like running water or personal protective equipment.

103. What should people know about the current Ebola situation?

Shorter answer:

1. *To get Ebola, people must come in direct contact with an infected person's body fluids.*
2. *Health workers, family, and friends in close contact with Ebola patients are at the highest risk of getting sick.*
3. *Ebola has spread quickly in West Africa primarily because of inadequate healthcare facilities and practices.*
4. *Medicines and vaccines are being developed.*
5. *Actions taken now are intended to limit the spread of Ebola.*

Longer answer:

1. ***To get Ebola, people must come in direct contact with an infected person's body fluids.***
 - You can stay informed by visiting official local, state and federal government webpages, such as <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/>.
2. ***Health workers, family, and friends in close contact with Ebola patients are at the highest risk of getting sick.***
 - Healthcare workers, family, and friends are most at risk because they are most likely to come in contact with the blood or body fluids of infected people.
3. ***Ebola has spread quickly in West Africa primarily because of inadequate healthcare facilities and practices.***
 - Many people in West Africa are malnourished and have poor shelter.
 - Many people in West Africa have little or no access to adequate healthcare providers and facilities.
 - Many of the existing healthcare facilities in West Africa are overwhelmed by the existing as well as the increasing Ebola caseload.
 - Burial practices in West Africa including extensive touching of the deceased contribute to the spread of Ebola.
4. ***Medicines and vaccines are being developed.***
5. ***Actions taken now are intended to limit the spread of Ebola.***
 - Early diagnosis of cases is important.
 - Early supportive care with rehydration and treatment of symptoms improves an infected person's chances of survival.
 - Hospitals and government agencies have activated their Ebola emergency plans.

