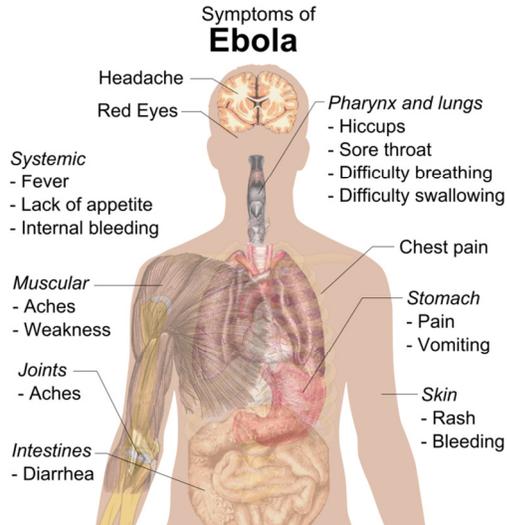


What you need to know about Ebola

By Valerie Clark, written for iHealthSpot on 10/22/2014

With the recently diagnosed cases of Ebola in the United States and the media frenzy that has followed,



many Americans are afraid and asking basic questions about the virus, like whether they can get it from a doorknob or a pet or from riding in a plane.

The good news is that you cannot become infected with Ebola by simply being in the same room with someone who has Ebola, or by touching something they touched. The virus is spread through bodily fluids—saliva, semen, urine, feces, or vomit. So unless that doorknob has saliva or urine on it, you should be fine. You won't catch it from your pet either, unless your animal becomes sick and you somehow ingest their bodily fluids.

Now for the bad news. If you have been exposed to Ebola and start having symptoms, you are going to get very sick and need hospitalization. If left untreated, Ebola will likely lead to death.

So how do you know if someone who is sick has Ebola? Early symptoms of Ebola are a sudden onset of fever, fatigue (extreme tiredness), and a sore throat. This could happen within 2 to 21 days of exposure to Ebola. As the virus progresses, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, and signs of poor kidney or liver function develop. A doctor will check for elevated white blood cells, platelet counts, and liver enzymes to diagnose Ebola. Additional testing may be performed to confirm the diagnosis.

Once symptoms of Ebola are present, the virus is considered highly contagious and will likely spread to anyone who is taking care of the infected individual. Healthcare workers have a high risk for getting Ebola because they are exposed to the bodily fluids of sick people more than anyone else.

Symptoms of Ebola

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Rash
- Sore Throat
- Headache
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Muscle pain
- Unexplained bleeding or bruising

The best way to protect yourself from getting Ebola is to avoid direct contact with an infected individual's blood, saliva, semen, vomit, urine, or feces. Healthcare workers should wear protective gear on their entire body including their face and hands. To be safe, don't share drinks, food, kiss, or have sex with someone who has been exposed to Ebola for 3 to 8 weeks.

If there is a chance you have been exposed to the disease, your symptoms should be closely monitored for 21 days to ensure you do not become infected and take precautions to limit possible transmission of Ebola to others. If you develop a fever or any other symptoms, call your doctor and proceed to the nearest hospital right away.

If you test positive for Ebola, you will receive treatment for your symptoms including intravenous fluids in the hospital. There are no treatments specific for Ebola at this time, although some biological therapies and vaccines for Ebola are being evaluated for human safety.

In order to get rid of Ebola, you will need to be symptom-free for 3 weeks.

The 2014 West Africa Ebola Outbreak

The 2014 Ebola outbreak is the largest spread of the disease since its discovery in 1976. There are five identified species of the virus, and the one responsible for the 2014 outbreak is the Zaire species.

Ebola got its name from the Ebola River in the Democratic Republic of Congo where the disease was discovered in 1976. There were hundreds of cases of Ebola in West Africa in the 70s, 90s, and 2000s, but none as great as the 2014 outbreak when Ebola spread to multiple countries including the United States. In August 2014, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” to address West Africa’s Ebola epidemic.