

UK Ebola Threat Remains Low

The recent and deadly outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa—the worst Ebola outbreak in history—has seized the world's attention. As the death toll creeps past 1,000, concerned citizens across the globe are assessing their risk and exploring preventive measures.

But UK residents should remain calm: There have still been no reported cases in the United Kingdom, according to Public Health England, although there have been several false alarms, including an elderly woman who collapsed after arriving at Gatwick Airport from West Africa. The outbreak is currently centred in the West African countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

What Are the Symptoms?

Ebola is an acute viral illness characterised by the sudden onset of fever, debilitating weakness, muscle pain, headache and sore throat. People often confuse the illness' early stages with cold or flu symptoms.

As it progresses, Ebola causes vomiting, diarrhoea, rash, impaired kidney and liver function and, eventually, internal and external bleeding, particularly from the mouth, ears and eyes.

The disease incubates in the sufferer's body for between two and 21 days, and victims become contagious once they present symptoms.

How Can I Protect Myself?

There is no vaccine for Ebola, although experts are currently testing several options. The lack of a viable vaccine is made all the more troubling due to the disease's high mortality rate—anywhere from 50 to 90 per cent.

Despite the disease's seriousness, the lack of a vaccine and the fact that not all chains of transmission are known, prevention is relatively

simple. Ebola is spread by contact with the bodily fluids and organs of infected animals, such as chimpanzees, gorillas, fruits bats, monkeys, forest antelope and porcupines. Humans contracted the disease in Africa after touching infected animals in the rainforest.

After humans are infected, Ebola can spread to other humans via contact with their bodily fluids, including saliva, sweat, blood and vomit. Therefore, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control is advising people to wash their hands regularly using soap or antiseptics. Other prevention tips include the following:

- Avoid unessential travel to affected countries.
- Do not touch the bodies or fluids of symptomatic patients or dead victims.
- Stay away from wild animals, both alive and dead, in affected countries.
- Use protective gear such as face masks and gloves when going near someone with the virus.
- Disinfect any areas an infected person has touched, such as bed linens.

Health care workers, hunters who touch dead animals and people in close contact with victims or infected people are most at risk.

If you suspect you have contracted Ebola, isolate yourself from others and seek medical help immediately. A sudden temperature, muscle aches, vomiting or rash may indicate that you have the disease.