

Low Health Threat in Los Angeles County: Addressing Emergency Responders' Concerns about Ebola

1. What is Ebola?

Ebola is a rare disease that has caused outbreaks (more disease than usual) in West Africa. Right now, there is a large Ebola outbreak in countries like Guinea (GIH-nee), Sierra Leone (see-air-uh-lee-“OWN”), and Liberia (ly-BEER-ee-uh). The number of affected countries may increase. See a map of affected countries on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) website: <http://tinyurl.com/CDCEbolaMap>

2. How does Ebola spread?

Ebola spreads from person-to-person by direct contact with a patient's body fluids, like sweat, saliva, mucus, blood, vomit, urine, feces, breast milk, and semen. Infected objects, like needles, can also spread it. Ebola can also spread after death, especially if handling an infected person's corpse, linens, mattresses, and other infected objects. Patients can spread the virus while they have a fever or other symptoms. The virus gets into the body through broken skin or mucous membranes (spongy skin like the kind you find in your eyes, nose, or mouth). People who do not show any symptoms do not spread Ebola. Ebola does not spread through air, food, water, mosquitos, or other insects. Only mammals, like humans, bats, apes, or monkeys, have been infected with Ebola.

3. What are the symptoms of Ebola?

It takes 8–10 days for most people to show symptoms, but it can range from 2–21 days. Ebola can cause these signs of disease:

- Severe headache
- Fever (101.5°F or higher)
- Weakness or muscle pain
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Stomach or muscle pain
- Lack of appetite
- Unexplained blood loss or bleeding
- Delirium (confusion)
- Erratic behavior (e.g. flailing, staggering)

4. How is Ebola treated?

There is no specific medication, treatment, or vaccine for Ebola. Instead, treatment focuses on keeping the patient alive by giving fluids and managing the serious health problems that can happen.

5. Does Ebola pose a health risk to LA County?

Right now, there has only been one case in the United States (Texas) and none in LA County. So, the risk of Ebola is very low unless a person has direct unprotected contact with an Ebola patient's body fluids or directly handles bats, apes, or monkeys from outbreak areas. Using effective infection control practices, like wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), helps prevent the spread of illness.



Key Messages:

- The risk of getting sick with Ebola is very low in the U.S. and in LA County, unless a person has direct, unprotected contact with an Ebola patient's body fluids or handles bats, apes, or monkeys from Ebola outbreak areas.
- Asking about recent travel history and using PPE when needed keeps first responders safe.

Where can the public go for more information?

Los Angeles County,
Department of Public Health
Dial 2-1-1

California Department of
Public Health
916-558-1784

Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention
800-CDC-INFO
800-232-4636

An Ebola Reference for First Responders

6. What is Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

Standard, contact, and droplet precautions, such as:

- Gloves
- Facemask
- Eye protection (goggles or face shield)
- Gown (fluid resistant or impermeable)
- Other items including double gloving, disposable shoe covers, and leg coverings in certain situations (e.g., large amounts of blood and body fluids present)

7. When should first responders wear PPE?

Before entering the scene if the operator alerts you of a possible Ebola case. You should also wear PPE if someone shows symptoms and has a higher risk of getting sick with Ebola. For example, travelers from Guinea, Sierra Leone, or Liberia may be at risk of Ebola for 21 days after leaving. So, it is crucial to ask symptomatic patients about their risk factors for Ebola within the past three weeks:

- Residence in, or travel from, a country where an Ebola outbreak is happening
- Contact with blood or other body fluids of a patient known or suspected to have Ebola
- Direct handling of bats, apes, or monkeys from areas where the disease is more common

For more information about Ebola-related PPE procedures for donning, removal, and disposal, see the CDC's Guidance for Emergency Medical Services: <http://tinyurl.com/EMSGuidance>

8. How can suspected or confirmed Ebola patients be transported safely?

First responders involved in air or ground transfer of Ebola patients should wear recommended PPE, taking special care to protect mucous membranes from splashes of blood, body fluids, or soiled gloves. Limit activities that increase the risk of exposure (e.g., airway management, CPR, use of needles). Alert the receiving hospital that you're transporting an Ebola patient so that the right infection control precautions are ready before the patient arrives.

9. What should first responders do if they're exposed to body fluids from a patient with suspected or confirmed Ebola?

- Stop working right away and wash the affected skin surfaces with soap and water. Mucous membranes should be irrigated with a large amount of water or eyewash solution.
- Contact occupational health for assessment and access to post-exposure services.
- Get medical evaluation and follow-up care, including fever monitoring twice daily for 21 days, after the last known exposure. Continue working during fever checks, only based on EMS agency policy and discussion with local, state, and federal public health authorities.

10. Will first responders be alerted if an Ebola case is confirmed in LA County?

Yes. The LA County Department of Public Health will notify first responders if an Ebola case is found. Further, the Department will alert any person who had contact with the patient.

Where can first responders go for more information?

Consult with and Report Suspect Cases to the County Health Department
Los Angeles County Acute Communicable Disease Control
213-240-7941 or 213-974-1234 after hours

Report Suspect Cases to City Health Departments

- **Pasadena Health Department:** 626-744-6043
- **Long Beach Health Department:** 562-570-4302

