About Ebola

Out of an abundance of caution, University Health Services (UHS) is collaborating with key departments at UMass Amherst, health representatives from the Five Colleges, hospitals, area health officials and emergency response agencies to prepare for the unlikely possibility of an Ebola exposure in our community.

This fact sheet is based on recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the World Health Organization and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH).

Ebola FAQs

WHAT IS EBOLA?

Ebola is a dangerous disease, discovered near the Ebola River in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1976. It is often, but not always, fatal. Some people will recover.

Ebola affects humans and non-human primates, such as chimps, gorillas and monkeys.

There has been ongoing transmission in the West African countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

HOW EBOLA IS TRANSMITTED?

Humans get Ebola from wild animals. It then spreads from person to person through direct contact, such as when broken skin or mucous membranes come into contact with blood, bodily secretions or needles contaminated with infected bodily fluids. Ebola is not airborne, foodborne or waterborne.

Families and friends in close contact with ill patient(s) or those who have died of Ebola are at greatest risk.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF EBOLA?

Symptoms begin abruptly and can include diarrhea, fever and headache, among others. They can appear anywhere between 2 – 21 days after exposure, although 8 – 10 days is most common. Even if individuals report what appear to be relevant symptoms (fever, vomiting, diarrhea), they are not considered a suspected case unless they have known exposure to Ebola.

WHAT IS THE RISK OF CONTRACTING EBOLA IN THE FIVE COLLEGE COMMUNITY?

The countries with the greatest numbers of Ebola cases are not common destinations for research or study abroad programs, and very few students from that area of West Africa are enrolled at the Five Colleges. Institutions are contacting those from affected areas and taking necessary steps to ensure community safety.

SHOULD TRAVEL BE CANCELLED?

Five Colleges faculty, staff and students should avoid travel to Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia at this time, in keeping with the CDC’s Level 3 warning against any non-essential travel.

If you are ill following travel from Liberia, Sierra Leone or Guinea, call UHS, (413) 577-5000, to discuss your illness. We want to advise you on the best way to obtain care before you come to a healthcare facility.

Those who have been in contact with an ill individual from one of these countries within the last 21 days should contact their healthcare facility or primary care provider before returning to campus. At UMass Amherst, call University Health Services, (413) 577-5000.

WHAT IS BEING DONE ON CAMPUS?

UMass Amherst is closely monitoring the latest information from national, regional and world health officials, and is following relevant guidance and precautions. These include using the CDC’s Ebola symptom checklist as a screening tool; conducting trainings for staff on proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE); reviewing the inventory of PPE and other emergency preparedness items; and meeting regularly with campus partners to share information about those who may be traveling or may have traveled into or from affected areas of concern.

WHAT IF I START TO FEEL SICK?

If you are ill following travel from Liberia, Sierra Leone or Guinea, call UHS, (413) 577-5000, to discuss your illness. We want to advise you on the best way to obtain care before you come to a healthcare facility.

Signs of illness include fever, vomiting or diarrhea, severe pain or weakness, and unusual bleeding or bruising.

Anyone who has traveled from Liberia, Sierra Leone or Guinea who needs emergency care should call 911 and tell the dispatcher about their possible exposure history.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

• Massachusetts Department of Public Health: www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph
• Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov
• World Health Organization: www.who.int/en