Ebola outbreak: information for members of the University

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1. Scope

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the Ebola outbreak an International Public Health. The UK Chief Medical Officer has emphasised that ‘although the risk to the UK remains low, in view of the concern about the growing number of cases, it is right to consider what further measures could be taken, to ensure that any potential cases arriving in the UK are identified as quickly as possible. Rapid access to healthcare services by someone infected with Ebola is not only important for their health but also key to reducing the risk of transmission to others’.

This document aims to provide general information and sources of more specific guidance to members of the University to assist with this objective.

2. Background

Since March 2014, there has been a large outbreak of Ebola virus in West Africa, chiefly affecting three countries: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. This is the largest ever known outbreak of this disease prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in August 2014. Cases have also occurred in Senegal, Nigeria, the U.S. and Spain.

Ebola is a rare but serious viral infection. People in the UK are at low risk of Ebola, as the virus is only transmitted by direct contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person, showing symptoms of the disease. There have been no cases of Ebola Virus Disease contracted in the UK during the current outbreak and the risk of Ebola arriving in the UK is low.
Information changes frequently so please check on the information provided by Public Health England on the disease and the UK response:


3. **Typical signs and symptoms**

Fever (e.g. pale skin, sweating or shivering), headache, sore throat, joint pain, diarrhoea, vomiting and sudden onset of physical weakness are all possible symptoms. The incubation period is between two and 21 days and only once symptoms start to show are the person’s body fluids considered to be infectious. Some of these symptoms are similar to other travel-related diseases (e.g. malaria), it is therefore important that urgent medical assessment is sought if you feel unwell.

4. **When you should seek medical care**

If you have returned from an affected area and have symptoms within three weeks of your return you should seek rapid medical attention by telephoning NHS 111 and inform the healthcare professional of your recent travel to West Africa. They will assess the details and if necessary arrange for medical assistance. You should stay isolated from others until this arrives and prevent other people from coming into contact with your body fluids.

**If you are a student in a hall of residence:** if possible, you should also let residence staff know of the situation by telephone.

**If you have been in close contact with a person known or suspected to have Ebola:** you should also seek medical help immediately.

5. **Advice for travellers**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against all but essential travel to the affected countries, except for those involved in the direct response to the Ebola outbreak, due to the narrow commercial options for flights and the impact of the outbreak on medical facilities.

Managers are advised to seek authorisation from their Head of School or Divisional Head regarding foreign travel. Further advice on travel to specific countries is available from the FCO:


The areas affected by the Ebola virus are listed by Public Health England:

6. Advice for managers and supervisors

There are no Bristol University students currently based in Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone and in accordance with current FCO advice no such placements will be organised by the University for students or staff. Additionally, the University does not have any students enrolled who normally reside in these affected countries. More generally, it remains unlikely but not impossible that people infected could arrive in the UK. The affected countries have exit screening at airports to ensure that individuals who are unwell do not board flights. The UK has also introduced entry screening for people arriving from these three countries. However, as the time between infection and symptoms first appearing can be up to 21 days, it is possible that individuals returning from affected countries could develop symptoms up to three weeks after arrival. People arriving back in the UK having travelled from any of the affected countries, and who are free of symptoms, are not infectious and there should be no restrictions on their normal activities.

As with all infectious diseases, practicing good hygiene measures will help keep you and others protected. However, if you are responding to an unwell person in the University then follow the advice in section 8.

7. Volunteering to assist with the Ebola crisis

Although there are no University-organised placements in the three main Ebola-affected countries, suitably qualified members of the University are volunteering to assist charity organisations with their crisis programmes. HR and the Occupational Health Service have been and should continue to be consulted when this admirable voluntary work is being undertaken and a return to work process put in place which follows Public Health England guidance. Staff holding joint appointments should also make the other employer aware of their situation. The charities organising these programmes will also have health screening and monitoring in place, including when volunteers return to the UK.

8. Advice for those responding to an unwell person in the University

Public Health England have provided advice specific to the University sector aimed at those responding to first aid requests for students who may be unwell and who may have returned to University from one of the affected areas because it is their home country. While student records suggest that Bristol University is unlikely to be affected it is still possible that a visiting student or other person on our premises may fit this profile. We have therefore issued simple advice for first aiders, porters,
security staff and halls of residence staff to follow if they are responding to someone who feels unwell and they meet specific criteria defined by Public Health England:

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/safety/media/gn/ebola-faq.pdf

9. Other questions

Can you be protected against Ebola by a vaccination?

Currently there is no licensed vaccine available to protect against Ebola virus. Several vaccines are being tested but are not yet available for clinical use.

What is the treatment?

Severely ill patients require intensive supportive care. They need intravenous fluids to rehydrate them. There is currently no specific treatment for the disease. Some patients will recover with the appropriate care. Should a case occur in someone returning from the affected areas, the risk of onward transmission to others in the UK would be extremely low.

10. Further information and advice for members of the University

If any further health or safety related information is required, please contact University Safety and Health Services – 0117 928 8780 / bristol-safety@bristol.ac.uk