

What Head Start Parents Should Know About Ebola

What Is Ebola?

Ebola is a rare disease that causes serious illness and can be fatal. It is caused by an *Ebolavirus* found in several African countries. However, outbreaks have been sporadic. Recovery from Ebola depends on good supportive clinical care and a person's immune response. People who recover from Ebola infection develop antibodies that last for at least 10 years.

What Are the Signs of Ebola?

Ebola is a serious illness caused by the Ebola virus.

Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Vomiting, diarrhea, or stomach pain
- Unexplained bleeding or bruising

Symptoms may appear anywhere from two to 21 days after coming in contact with someone infected with Ebola. Symptoms commonly appear after eight to 10 days.

How Does Ebola Spread?

Ebola virus is spread through direct contact with the blood or body fluids of a person who is sick with Ebola. This includes, but is not limited to: feces, saliva, sweat, urine, vomit, and breast milk. The virus in blood and body fluids can enter another person through broken skin or through the eyes, nose, or mouth.

It is important to know that:

- Ebola virus is not spread through air or by water, or by any food grown or approved for consumption in the U.S.
- A person who has been exposed to the Ebola virus but does not have symptoms is not infectious.

Who Is at Risk?

Anyone who comes in contact with the blood or body fluids of a person sick with Ebola is at highest risk for infection.

Children are at greater risk of catching seasonal flu than they are the Ebola virus. Unless you or your child has had direct contact with the blood or body fluids of someone who is sick with Ebola, you and your children are not at risk.

How Is Ebola Diagnosed?

If you suspect your child has Ebola, you should have your child see his or her doctor.

Should My Child with Ebola Be Excluded from Head Start?

Children diagnosed with Ebola should remain out of the center until a doctor determines the child is no longer infectious. Your child's Head Start center might ask for a note from your doctor to clear your child to return.

How to Stop the Spread of Ebola?

- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact, such as kissing, hugging, and sharing cups or eating utensils, with people who are sick.
- Clean household surfaces such as countertops, doorknobs, sinks, and toilets often.
- If you provide care to other children who are sick, wear gloves when treating a scrape or changing a diaper. These gloves, used bandages or diapers, and other such materials should be removed and safely thrown away to avoid contact with the eyes, nose, or mouth. Wash your hands again after removing gloves.
- If you have recently traveled to West Africa or may have been exposed to someone with Ebola, be sure to follow your local public health agency's instructions.

How to Talk to Children about Ebola?

- In order to reduce your child's fears of Ebola, it is best to limit his or her exposure to TV reports on the disease.
- If children have seen pictures or videos from West Africa, explain that the situation in the United States is very different and what they may have seen on TV is not happening near them.
- Be honest. Answer questions based on the facts and as age-appropriate.
- Reduce any stigma by stressing that Ebola is caused by a virus, not a person, and that the virus is difficult to transmit (i.e., it is not airborne).
- Remind children to wash their hands. Good handwashing is not only beneficial for your children's health, but it can also help your children feel able to make a difference.

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Where Can I Learn More?

- Immediate crisis counseling is available to those concerned about Ebola through the Disaster Distress Helpline at (toll-free) 1-800-985-5990 or [SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline](#)
- Check out [Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks](#)