



Ebola Hemorrhagic Fever: *A Fact Sheet for Ohio EMS* August 9, 2014

As communicated by multiple media outlets, a deadly epidemic of Ebola hemorrhagic fever (Ebola) is occurring in several western countries in Africa. Two American healthcare workers who contracted Ebola recently returned to the United States and are receiving medical care. Within the general public, there is fear that the epidemic will spread globally from individuals engaged in international travel. There have been several cases of patients who have entered our healthcare system, some via EMS, that have been suspected to be infected with Ebola. None of these cases have been confirmed thus far.

The risk of the Ebola virus spreading to the United States is extremely small. Nevertheless, knowledge is power, and it is imperative that Ohio EMS, as first-line responders, must be cognizant of the facts.

- Ebola is a viral infection that causes severe illness with a 50-90 percent mortality rate
- The signs and symptoms of Ebola include:
 - Fever
 - Headache
 - Vomiting
 - Diarrhea
 - Sore throat
 - Joint and muscle aches
 - Weakness
 - Abdominal pain
- The onset of signs and symptoms of Ebola occurs suddenly
- The incubation period of the virus is 8-10 days, but can range from 2-21 days
- A person infected with Ebola is not contagious until they exhibit signs and symptoms

- Transmission of the Ebola virus occurs through:
 - Direct contact with blood and body fluids of an infected person
 - Exposure to objects that are contaminated by an infected person (e.g. needles)
- The Ebola virus is not transmitted through air, water, or food
- Treatment of Ebola is supportive (IV hydration and electrolyte replacement)
- A vaccine for immunization against Ebola does not currently exist

Ohio EMS transports hundreds of patients per day with fever, vomiting, and diarrhea to emergency care facilities, and it is impossible to determine the exact etiology of these illnesses in the prehospital setting. Regardless of the cause of the illness, the Ohio EMS provider will obtain a patient history that typically includes the onset and severity of symptoms, medications, history of travel, and potential exposures. The prehospital patient care delivery will usually include stabilization of vital signs, fluid resuscitation, and transport.

Likewise, the measures taken to prepare ourselves to deliver patient care have not changed due to the Ebola epidemic in Africa. The best avenue to protect the patient, the public, and ourselves is to consistently utilize universal precautions. We must always don the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and exercise mandatory hand washing during every patient encounter.

As always, thank you for your dedicated service to the citizens and visitors of Ohio. I am always proud of the response and the positive contributions of Ohio EMS during the challenges facing our healthcare system and our nation. Please remember that the Ebola virus is only transmitted through direct contact, so don your PPE and wash your hands.

Stay safe and stay healthy.

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