

Ebola Virus Disease



Causative agent

Ebola virus disease (EVD; formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever) is caused by infection with Ebola virus which belongs to the family *Filoviridae*.

EVD first appeared in 1976 in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the latter in a village situated near the Ebola River, from which the disease took its name.

Clinical features

EVD is a severe acute viral illness often characterised by sudden onset of fever, intense weakness, muscle pain, headache and sore throat. This is followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, rash, impaired kidney and liver function, and in some cases, both internal and external bleeding.

Incubation period

2 to 21 days

Mode of transmission

Ebola virus is introduced into the human population through close contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other body fluids of infected animals. Some fruit bats are considered to be the natural host of Ebola virus.

It then spreads in the community through human-to-human transmission, with infection resulting from direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, secretions, organs or other body fluids of infected people, and indirect contact with environments contaminated with such fluids.

People are infectious as long as their blood and secretions contain the virus.

Management

There is no specific treatment for the disease.

Patients must be managed in isolation facilities to prevent the spread of infection. Severely ill patients require intensive supportive care. Patients are frequently dehydrated and require oral or intravenous rehydration.

Prevention

There is currently no registered vaccine for EVD in Hong Kong. To prevent the infection, it is important for travellers who go to affected areas to observe the following:

- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before and after touching the mouth, nose or eyes; before eating; after using the toilet; after touching public installations such as handrails or door knobs; or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretion after coughing or sneezing. Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with either a clean cotton towel or a paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, hand hygiene with 70 to 80% alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative
- Avoid close contact with feverish or ill persons, and avoid contact with patient's blood and body fluids, and objects contaminated with blood or body fluids of patients
- Avoid contact with animals
- Cook food thoroughly before consumption
- Travellers should seek medical advice promptly if they become ill within 21 days after returning from affected areas and inform doctor of recent travel history

