

# Ebola virus disease risk management

## Managing risks associated with travel into and out of West African countries

Version 2, 11 August 2014

This document is subject to change in response to revised WHO and DFAT guidance

### Purpose

This policy and guideline has been prepared to advise IM4DC delivery centres, their staff, IM4DC activity participants and personnel from associated organisations about how to manage risks around Ebola virus disease (EVD) during the current West African public health emergency.

Appendices to this policy and guideline provide advice to personnel involved in IM4DC activities: participants, staff from delivery organisations and IM4DC, and people who may interact with them.

This document is based on advice from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), World Health Organisation (WHO), Risk Management at The University of Western Australia, and UWA School of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine.

### The nature of the risk

On 8 August 2014, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak of EVD in West Africa as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. On 18 August the WHO issues a statement on travel and transport in relation to the EVD outbreak. On 28 August, the WHO issued a roadmap to scale up international response to the Ebola outbreak. The outbreak in west Africa is the most serious outbreak of EVD in recorded history. See <http://who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/en/> for latest information from the WHO. An EVD factsheet is at <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/>

The Australian Government's Department of Health EVD factsheet also provides comprehensive advice

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ebola-info-patients.htm>

Ebola virus causes an acute infection that causes death in up to 90% of those infected. The mortality rate in the current epidemic stands at around 60%. There is no effective antiviral treatment and no vaccine.

Whilst the risk of infection for IM4DC participants, delivery personnel and staff remains very low, it is sensible that IM4DC and its personnel have in place appropriate measures to minimise risks.

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## Geography

Locations currently reporting active EVD cases include Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The number of reported cases is rising, with cases in Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and a case in Senegal. Additional West African and West Central African countries may become caught up in the outbreak. The situation is evolving rapidly. The few infected foreigners have been mainly health workers and volunteers.

This version of the Policy and Guideline defines “**affected countries**” as Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, in line with current WHO and DFAT advice. Other countries could be so classified in future. Travellers to West Africa and West Central Africa should visit the DFAT website regularly. This policy and guideline document will be updated if the list of affected countries change.

## Exposure

Virus transmission is by:

- direct contact with body fluids from people with EVD
- contact with contaminated medical products such as syringe needles
- consumption of wild animal meat (‘bushmeat’).

The risk of transmission of EVD during air travel and casual contact outside affected countries is low. Unlike infections such as influenza or tuberculosis, Ebola is not spread by breathing air (and the airborne particles it contains) from an infected person. Transmission requires direct contact with blood, secretions, organs or other body fluids of infected persons.

Travellers are, in any event, advised to avoid all such contacts and routinely practice careful hygiene, like hand washing.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of EVD can include fever (particularly sudden onset of fever), muscle aches, weakness, headache, sore throat, progressing through to diarrhoea and rashes.

Whilst these symptoms are Ebola specific, they may not indicate EVD, and can be equally relevant for the individual’s health for other illnesses, such as Malaria.

## Travel restrictions

Travel restrictions are being implemented in many African countries, as well as at major travel hubs around the world. Authorities in several countries have implemented flight bans due to the spread of EVD. An increasing number of carriers have indefinitely suspended flights into Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. More disruptions and cancellations can be expected.

Many land borders have been closed. It is likely that more land borders, ports and river crossings will close, with little or no notice.

Health screening is being undertaken at many international airports that have direct flights into the region or that are major air travel hubs. Travellers with fever or Ebola-like symptoms may be subject to quarantine or denied entry or exit from certain countries.

Travellers should check with their carrier before attempting to travel.

## Risk reduction

### Travellers from Australia

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade advises Australians to reconsider their need to travel to Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The travel advice currently does not apply to other countries in West Africa or the wider African continent. See <http://www.smarttraveller.gov.au/zw-cgi/view/TravelBulletins/Ebola> for more information and latest updates

Individual travellers may consider their own risk to be small or manageable. They should recognise, however, that regional and return travel may be difficult. As well, civil order may deteriorate quickly and non-EVD health risks may increase while scarce resources are devoted to the EVD emergency. There are only limited options for consular assistance available for Australians in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

University staff are required to obtain specific approval for travel to affected countries through universities' travel management systems.

### Travellers from West Africa

People travelling to Australia or elsewhere from West Africa do not pose a significant risk if they are well and have had no contact with infected persons.

Those who have had contact with a patient suffering from Ebola infection will come under local quarantine regulations. They are likely to require a medical examination and possible blood tests to establish fitness to fly. In some Ebola-affected locations, police and military personnel enforce quarantine cordons. No attempt should be made to leave a quarantined area without permission from the public health authorities.

Those who have had no direct contact with infection but have been in a district with Ebola infection AND develop symptoms of infection (fever, runny nose, sore throat, diarrhoea, vomiting, fine skin rash) should seek advice from a doctor about their fitness to fly. They may face additional restrictions at airline check-in and departure gates and health screening on arrival at destination airports.

All passengers whose travel originated in affected countries in Africa will have their health checked on arrival at Australian airports. The Australian Government has in place banners and electronic messaging at international airports to raise awareness of the symptoms of Ebola. As part of routine procedures, incoming flights to Australia have on-board announcements, asking passengers who are feeling unwell with fever, chills or sweats to alert a crew member. Airline crew members will alert border protection and biosecurity staff for follow-up health procedures.

## **Advice for IM4DC personnel**

Specific advice for personnel involved in IM4DC activities is set out in the **attachments**.

This includes templates for communication to IM4DC participants and delivery personnel.

## **IM4DC response**

In the short term, IM4DC activities in Africa and involving West Africans will continue largely as planned, subject to the protocols set out in this guideline

IM4DC will continue to monitor developments and review its response as circumstances change.

**Issued by IM4DC Perth, tel +61 8 9263 9811.**

**IM4DC will update this policy and guideline periodically.**

## Attachment A: Procedure for IM4DC staff and contractors

IM4DC management has a responsibility to brief program support staff, lecturers and presenters, and participants about the procedures in place to manage Ebola virus disease (EVD) risks.

The current Australian Government advice on the EVD outbreak can be found at [www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ebola-info-patients.htm](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ebola-info-patients.htm)

Staff and contractors should ensure that they are familiar with the latest advice from government and keep well informed regarding how the disease is transmitted, the symptoms and the IM4DC Policy and Guideline: *Ebola Virus Disease risk management*.

### Briefing of course/study tour participants

#### Pre-arrival

Participants are sent an email, one week before arrival in Australia, requesting that they see a doctor prior to coming to Australia if they feel unwell and are from, or have visited an affected country (see Attachment B).

Participants are also briefed in the IM4DC pre-departure book about EVD and advised that IM4DC has an EVD guideline and procedure in place.

#### On arrival

On the first day of the course/study tour, participants will be briefed by a Program Manager or delegate, who will cover the following from the IM4DC policy and guideline:

- How Ebola virus is transmitted – direct contact with the body fluids of affected people, airborne transmission is not known to occur, people infected with Ebola cannot infect others until they have symptoms
- The symptoms of EVD – fever, particularly sudden onset of fever, muscle aches, weakness, headache, sore throat, progressing through to diarrhoea and rashes
- Reinforce that if at any time anybody feels unwell, they are to let the IM4DC team know immediately or use the 24/7 emergency number provided
  - Whilst these symptoms are Ebola specific, this should not specifically be focussed on Ebola, as it is equally relevant for the individual's health for other illnesses such as Malaria.

#### During the course/study tour

##### **If a participant reports that they are unwell or appears to be unwell**

- Identify if they are from an affected country
- Enquire if they have travelled to any of the affected countries in the previous month

- Or had recent contact with anyone from an affected county

If it is yes to any of the above, organise an immediate appointment at and transport to either a doctor's surgery, or transport the participant to the emergency department at the closest hospital.

Depending on the severity of symptoms, sensible precautions should be taken.

#### **If the participant attends a medical facility**

- Notify the medical staff that the individual has been to, or is from, West Africa
- Ask for the participant to give written permission for the doctor to tell IM4DC of the results of the consultation
- Notify IM4DC management.

#### **If a participant has severe symptoms**

If a participant presents with severe symptoms where there is a danger of contamination occurring i.e. vomiting:

- Separate the participant from the group
- Call an ambulance to transport them to hospital
- Immediately notify IM4DC management.

#### **If a participant is considered at risk and refuses to see a medical practitioner**

If a participant is identified as being unwell during a program, is considered a risk to other participants' health and is refusing to attend a medical practitioner or hospital:

- Remove individual from the group
- Arrange a medical practitioner to come to them
- Immediately notify IM4DC management.
- Participants will be kept informed at all times of any issues relating to their health.

#### **If a participant is confirmed as having EVD**

IM4DC management will follow the advice of the State Departments of Health and university risk management offices if it has been confirmed a participant tests positive for EVD, regarding managing staff and participant health and quarantine.

Internal and external communications will be managed by university public affairs teams, in consultation with DFAT communications personnel.

#### **If a participant's route home is affected by travel restrictions**

Where possible, IM4DC will work with the travel providers to find an alternative route home for the participant.

If there is no possibility of returning home at the end of the course, IM4DC will discuss the options with the participant.

A final decision will be made on a case-by-case basis by the IM4DC management team.

### **Briefing of lecturers presenting to the program**

IM4DC will provide all university, government and civil society representatives presenting to a course/study group with the IM4DC policy and guideline: *Ebola Virus Disease risk management*.

## Attachment B: Information for participants

### Pre departure information

If a course or study tour includes participants from West Africa or West Central Africa, the IM4DC team will send all course/study tour participants the following email note one week prior to departure for the course/study tour.

Dear <Name>,

#### **Ebola virus disease**

As you will be aware, the World Health Organisation has declared the Ebola virus disease outbreak in certain countries in West Africa a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Whilst the risk of infection remains low, it is important that we put in place measures to manage the health and wellbeing of participants.

If you are from one of the affected countries, or have visited one of the affected countries within the last month:

- And you feel at all unwell now, or have done so in the past week, you should see a doctor prior to departing for Australia.
- If you feel unwell at any time during the course [study tour], you should immediately let one of the IM4DC team members know.

In addition, please be aware that as part of routine procedures, incoming flights to Australia have on-board announcements, asking passengers who are feeling unwell with fever, chills or sweats to alert a crew member. Airline crew members would alert biosecurity staff for health follow up.

Australian Border officers will be assessing the health of passengers who have originated their travel from affected parts of West Africa. They will also provide information and advice to passengers at the border who are unsure of what they should do if they are feeling ill.

Further information on the Ebola virus disease outbreak is available from these websites:

World Health Organisation — <http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>

Australian Government —  
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ebola-info-patients.htm>

There will be an on-arrival briefing about procedures if anybody feels unwell.

With kind regards

<signature>



## Course/study tour handbooks

The following text will be included in course/study tour handbooks in the health matter section:

The World Health Organisation has declared the Ebola virus disease outbreak in certain countries in West Africa a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Whilst the risk of infection remains low, it is important that we put in place measures to manage the health and wellbeing of participants.

If you feel unwell at any time during the course [study tour], you should immediately let one of the IM4DC team members know.

Further information on the Ebola virus disease outbreak is available from these websites:

World Health Organisation — <http://www.who.int/csr/don/en/>

Australian Government — <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-ebola-info-patients.htm>