

Ebola outbreak 2014



West Africa is currently in the midst of a public health crisis. The Ebola outbreak began in Guinea and spread to neighbouring Liberia and Sierra Leone and about 600 people have died so far. Despite the panic that an Ebola outbreak causes, there is not that much reason to fear; but plenty of reason to be cautious.

According to the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) in South Africa, the outbreak poses little threat to South Africans. This is because Guinea and its neighbours are not frequent travel destinations for most South Africans. Additionally, the infection is spread by direct contact with contaminated blood or body tissues so the outbreak is more potentially risky for health-care providers in the region and first responders like nurses.

The NICD does warn that business people in trade and industry travelling in affected areas should take precautions or avoid travel if possible. Unicef says that the risk of further spread of the virus should be taken seriously.

There is currently no vaccine or cure for the virus and it has an extremely high mortality rate. The current strain is particularly virulent, says Unicef's spokesperson, Laurent Duvallier.

What is Ebola?

Ebola is a virus which causes hemorrhagic fever and is characterised by severe bleeding and organ failure. Ebola is spread through direct contact with infected body fluids like blood and other tissues. As a result, family members and caretakers are often infected. However, infected people are not contagious until they become symptomatic.

This potentially fatal virus is not spread as easily as viruses like the common cold but it is important to prevent infection as much as possible. Avoid contact with contaminated blood and tissues to prevent infection.

Although the virus remains a threat in many parts of the African continent, it is important to remain calm, contact the local authorities for more information, and see a doctor immediately if a case of Ebola infection is suspected.