



Houston Department of  
Health and Human Services

## **VIRAL HEMORRHAGIC FEVERS FACT SHEET**

### **What are viral hemorrhagic fevers?**

Viral hemorrhagic fevers (VHFs) refer to a group of illnesses that are caused by several viruses. The most common characteristic of these fevers is failure of the vascular (bloodstream and lymph) system. Many of these viruses cause severe, life-threatening diseases. Some of the viruses in this group are Ebola, Lassa, Marburg, Hanta and Rift Valley fever.

### **How does a person get a viral hemorrhagic fever?**

Viruses that cause most viral hemorrhagic fevers are normally found in animals or arthropods (such as ticks and mosquitoes). People are exposed to some of these viruses when they handle infected animals or come in contact with urine, feces, saliva or other body secretions of infected animals. Other viruses are transmitted by the bite of an infected arthropod. Once a person becomes infected, some viruses can be spread to others by contact with the person or their body fluids. Objects, such as used syringes, contaminated with body fluids of ill persons can also spread the disease to others.

### **What are the viral hemorrhagic fever illnesses?**

Initial symptoms usually include high fever, fatigue, dizziness, muscle aches and loss of strength. As the disease progresses the person may develop bleeding under the skin, from internal organs, or from body openings (i.e., mouth, eyes or ears). Shock, multiple organ failure, seizures, delirium and coma can also occur.

### **How soon do infected people get sick?**

The time frame from exposure to illness is specific to each virus and can range from 2-10 days to as much as 6 weeks.

### **What should I do if I think I have been exposed a viral hemorrhagic fever?**

The occurrence of viral hemorrhagic fever is extremely rare. However, if you have traveled to a part of the world where these viruses regularly occur and you are having symptoms of these fevers you should contact your doctor immediately. There is no specific treatment for these viral infections, but it is very important to receive supportive medical care. People with viral hemorrhagic fevers must be hospitalized and isolated.

### **How can we prevent viral hemorrhagic fever?**

People traveling to countries where these fevers commonly occur (Africa, Middle East and Asia) should be educated about these diseases. People should avoid coming into contact with animals infected with these viruses. It is important to control rodents and insects around homes, workplaces and recreational areas. If a person becomes infected every effort must be made to stop person to person transmission by isolating the patient, using protective clothing and gloves, and proper disposal or disinfecting of instruments and equipment.

### **Where can I get more information on viral hemorrhagic fevers?**

[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

<http://www.houstontx.gov/health>  
Houston Department of Health and Human Services  
8000 N. Stadium Drive  
Houston, TX 77054

[www.tdh.state.tx.us](http://www.tdh.state.tx.us)

**Source of information:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.houstontx.gov/health>  
Houston Department of Health and Human Services  
8000 N. Stadium Drive  
Houston, TX 77054

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