

# Information for the Public

## Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers



### **What is viral hemorrhagic fever (VHF)?**

Viral hemorrhagic fevers (VHF) are caused by many different viruses that are found in nature in animals and insects. VHFs are named for the most severe form of the disease: hemorrhage (bleeding) from many body sites along with a high fatality rate. However, not all cases of VHFs are this severe.

Ebola and Marburg are the best known VHFs and occur in parts of Africa. Other VHFs occur in parts of Africa, the Middle East or the Far East. VHF does not occur naturally in most of the United States. However, a traveler exposed in another part of the world can become ill after arrival in the US.

### **What are the symptoms of VHFs?**

Signs and symptoms include fever, nausea and vomiting, joint and muscle pain, headache, extreme weakness, sore throat, abdominal pain, vomiting and diarrhea. Some patients have slowing of their pulse rate and rapid breathing. Some patients get conjunctivitis, difficulty swallowing, or a rash. After several days, patients may have bleeding gums; nose bleeds; bruising; or blood in urine, stool or vomitus. Some types of VHF like Lassa fever can be very mild with a fatality rate of 2%. Some types of VHF like Ebola or Marburg have very high fatality rates.

### **How soon after exposure do symptoms begin?**

Symptoms generally develop between 2 and 21 days after exposure, however the incubation period depends on the type of virus.

### **Can VHFs be spread person-to-person?**

For some types of VHF, yes. Ebola, Marburg, Lassa fever and others can spread by touching body fluids of infected patients and then touching your mouth or eyes. Body fluids can also cause infection through a needle stick or a break in the skin. Hospital staff need to use gloves, gowns, goggles and a mask and careful hand washing when treating patients with these infections. VHF does not spread through casual contact like passing someone in the hallway.

### **How likely is it that I will be exposed to VHFs?**

There has never been a case of VHF in West Virginia. It is possible that a traveler could bring VHF into the state from somewhere else, but it is not likely.

### **What will happen if there is a VHF case in West Virginia?**

When a VHF case is recognized by a physician, he or she has to report the case to the local health department. State and local public health departments will work together with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to get laboratory tests to determine if the person really has VHF. All persons who had contact with the VHF patient will be notified and monitored for development of signs and symptoms of disease. All identified VHF patients will be placed in isolation to protect other people from getting the disease.