



Information on Ebola for people travelling to Sierra Leone, especially those visiting friends and family

Current Outbreak

There is a large outbreak of Ebola virus disease occurring in West Africa – the largest outbreak ever reported. The first Ebola cases were recognised in Guinea in March 2014 with Liberia reporting cases a few days later. The outbreak continued, and two Sierra Leonean nationals who had attended a funeral in Guinea contracted the disease and died. The outbreak spread as people have moved around the region and across borders. At the end of May 2014, a large number of cases were reported from Kailahun district in Sierra Leone.

The situation in Sierra Leone

There have now been several hundred cases reported in Sierra Leone, including a large number of deaths. Cases have been reported from Kailahun, Kenema, Bo, Koinadugu, Moyamba and Port Loko districts, with the largest number being reported from Kailahun district.

How the outbreak is spreading

Ebola can spread from animals to people through close contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected animal, commonly when slaughtering, handling or consuming the meat of wild animals (bush meat).

However, in this outbreak Ebola is being spread person to person, through contact with the blood or body fluids of infected people. Those most at risk are people caring for an infected person, such as relatives, doctors or nurses. Mourners have also caught Ebola during the funeral of an infected person, through touching the body and other ritual practices.

Avoiding infection in Sierra Leone

The overall risk of being infected with Ebola during a visit to Sierra Leone is low, but the risk to you as an individual depends on the areas that you will be visiting and the types of activities that you will be doing whilst you are there. You can find out the latest information on the areas where Ebola is transmitted from the World Health Organisation (<http://www.who.int/csr/don/archive/disease/ebola/en/>). The risk of infection will obviously be higher in these areas and you need to be aware of this if you are planning to travel there. There are some important things that you can do to minimise the risk:

- if you will **be looking after a person who is unwell**, it is important to follow basic measures to reduce the spread of infection and **minimise contact with blood and body fluids**. Barrier techniques include wearing protective gowns, gloves, masks and eye protection. When **wearing disposable gloves**, wash the gloves with soap and water before removing them; do not

reuse the gloves; instead dispose of them safely and then wash your hands again

- **avoid touching the body of the deceased person or taking part in other funeral rituals.** Remember that in some instances the person may have died from Ebola even if the cause of death is unknown or is thought to be something other than Ebola; If you cannot avoid touching the body, consider wearing gloves and other barrier protection
- **practice safe sex**, including the use of barrier contraception such as **condoms**; Ebola can be spread through sexual intercourse for up to seven weeks after recovery
- maintain good hand hygiene by **washing hands regularly with soap and water**, especially after visiting the toilet and before eating. If access to soap and clean water is limited, hand sanitizers may be used as long as hands are not visibly dirty

If you develop fever or other symptoms such as chills, muscle aches, headache, nausea, vomiting, sore throat or rash while in Sierra Leone, you should visit a health-care provider immediately. Your travel insurance company can help you find a health-care provider in the area. You should be aware that it is now a legal duty in Sierra Leone to report to your nearest health clinic or hospital if you or a dependent is exhibiting Ebola symptoms and have recently travelled to an affected area.

What to do in the UK before you travel

- see your GP for **general advice on travel health** (ideally six weeks before), including malaria prevention and making sure that your vaccines are up to date. Malaria remains a major cause of illness in travellers visiting Sierra Leone, so prevention measures are important. Information on travel health is also available from the National Travel Health website (www.nathnac.org)
- make sure that you have adequate **travel insurance** or other means to pay for healthcare should you fall ill.
- consider taking a supply of **surgical masks and disposable gloves** to use in case of close contact with persons **suspected of having Ebola**

What should I do if I come back from Sierra Leone and feel unwell?

If you feel unwell with symptoms such as fever, chills, muscle aches, headache, nausea, vomiting, sore throat or rash within 21 days of coming back from Sierra Leone, you should seek urgent medical attention and explain that you have recently visited West Africa. There are other illnesses (flu, typhoid fever and malaria) that have similar symptoms in the early stages, so it is important to be seen by a doctor who can determine what might be causing your symptoms and carry out relevant tests.

Sources of further information

General travel health information and advice: <http://www.nathnac.org>

Regularly updated information from Public Health England about Ebola (including the outbreak and maps): <http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/InfectiousDiseases/InfectionsAZ/Ebola/>

Ebola virus disease - risk assessment of outbreak in West Africa:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ebola-virus-disease-risk-assessment-of-outbreak-in-west-africa>

Advice for UK citizens travelling to affected countries to participate in humanitarian aid and healthcare delivery:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ebola-virus-disease-information-for-humanitarian-aid-workers>