

## **Ebola Awareness for Dental Hygienists**

Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) is a disease caused by the Ebola virus.<sup>1,2</sup> The incubation period for EVD is 2-21 days and during this time, prior to the onset of any clinical signs and symptoms, people are not considered infectious.<sup>3,4</sup> The main mode of transmission is via person-to-person transmission by having direct contact with blood or body fluids.<sup>1</sup> EVD cannot be spread through the air, water or food.<sup>2</sup> To date there has never been a reported case of EVD in Canada.<sup>1,2</sup>

Health Canada has provided information on how health care workers can be prepared for Ebola:

*Health professionals in Canada are advised to be vigilant for the recognition, reporting and prompt investigation of patients with symptoms of Ebola virus Disease (EBD) and similar diseases that can cause viral hemorrhagic fevers.<sup>1</sup>*

Recognition and awareness includes understanding the signs, symptoms and risk factors of EVD. Clinical criteria include those presenting or reporting a fever of greater than 38.6 degrees Celsius and at least one of the following additional signs or symptoms:

- Malaise
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Vomiting
- Rash
- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Sore throat
- Red eyes
- Unexplained hemorrhage.<sup>1,2,3,5</sup>

Epidemiological risk factors within the previous 3 weeks prior to the onset of any of the clinical signs and symptoms would include:

- Residence or travel to an area known to have active cases of EVD
- Contact with blood or other body fluids of a patient known to have EVD
- Contact with bats or primates from an EVD affected area
- Household members of a probable confirmed case of EVD without high-risk exposures
- Health care or laboratory workers wearing personal protective equipment who have had direct contact with an patient infected with EVD or who processed bodily fluids.<sup>1,2,3,5</sup>

The CDHBC supports the College of Dental Surgeons of BC (CDSBC) statement advising dental offices to screen clients over the phone when confirming appointments. In addition, the CDHBC advises independent dental hygiene practitioners to screen as appropriate. Screening can be accomplished by asking questions to rule out any clinical or epidemiological risks for EVD, which would include:

1. Asking about travel to areas where the EVD is active within the previous 21 days. These areas would include the West African countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria or the Democratic Republic of Congo.
2. Asking if they have experienced any clinical signs and symptoms as described above.

If clients respond “Yes” to both of these questions, they should be advised to avoid contact with any other person and consult their local hospital health department.<sup>6</sup> As well, dental hygiene services should be postponed until the 21 day incubation period has passed without presentation of signs or symptoms, or until the client who has been diagnosed with EVD has been given clearance by their physician.

Registrants working in a community public health setting should refer to EVD protocols set out by the individual regional health authorities.

Registrants working in educational facilities should take note of the above protocols as well as follow any protocols deemed necessary by their respective departments and/or institution.

Registrants have an ethical requirement not to do harm to clients or put them at undue risk. Therefore, if a registrant has travelled or plans to travel to an area that has an active outbreak of EVD, they should voluntarily quarantine themselves upon return for the 21 day incubation period, prior to returning to their dental hygiene practice.

The Government of Canada website has a page dedicated to [travel advisories](#). On this page they state that all non-essential travel to countries affected by Ebola is to be avoided. Further information can also be found at the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#) as they have posted an information sheet on what to consider for those travelers returning from Africa.

## References

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5. Infectious Disease Society of America. Guidelines for Evaluation of US Patients Suspected of Having Ebola Virus Disease [Internet]. Arlington, VA: Infectious Disease Society of America.

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6. US Department of Health and Human Services. Ebola Virus Disease (Ebola): Algorithm for Evaluation of the Returned Traveler [Internet]. Atlanta, GA: Center for Disease Control and Prevention; 2014. [cited 2014 Oct 21]. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/ebola-algorithm.pdf>