



THE VOICE OF FOOD RETAIL

Feeding Families  Enriching Lives

Ebola Update November 2014

Ebola Virus

Ebola is a common term for a disease formerly known as Ebola hemorrhagic fever. Infection with the virus caused hemorrhaging in non-human primate hosts, humans and other mammals. There are five identified Ebola Virus species and four of them are known to cause disease in humans.

History

The virus was first discovered in 1976 in Africa near the Ebola River. The host organism is unknown but is believed to be fruit bats. The virus has caused outbreaks in Africa over the past four decades when hunters have either become cross contaminated or consumed contaminated bush meat from infected animals (chimpanzees, gorillas, fruit bats, monkeys, forest antelope and porcupines). Human to human transmission has occurred in villages and tribes when people were caring for ill loved ones or when performing burial rituals.

Current Outbreak

The current outbreak is the largest in history and started with a small number of cases in Nigeria and one case in Senegal. The countries with widespread cases include Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Spain had one case of a health care worker and the US had one case due to a traveler from Liberia and 3 cases of health care workers. All health care worker illnesses are under investigation by the WHO and in-country authorities – they total approximately 550 out of 13,000 total cases worldwide.

Transmission

Transmission of Ebola virus is through direct contact with body fluids of infected people or animals. Viruses need a human or animal host to reproduce. If in a body fluid such as blood or mucus, the virus could survive for several hours to days depending on the conditions. There is a lack of data on this topic due to the nature of Ebola and challenges with research.

Prevention

The same precautions you have in place for food safety will be effective for preventing Ebola. The most important precautionary measure is to make sure employees report symptoms to managers and do not work when sick. The symptoms of Ebola are the same as some foodborne illness and are reportable to managers – fever, diarrhea, vomiting and abdominal pain. Employees should be trained and feel comfortable reporting to their managers if they feel ill. The work environment should support them not working when they are sick.

Associates who have traveled to western Africa should follow the CDC's travel warnings and monitor symptoms for a period of three weeks after returning to the US.

In terms of food handling, the food safety protocols we have in place and the training from SafeMark will give associates the tools to prevent contamination of food. Proper hygiene including handwashing is probably the single most effective tool in addition to glove use when handling ready to eat foods.

OSHA has provided information on Ebola on safety and health issues and is working with all relevant government agencies to pull together appropriate guidelines for worker health for all industry sectors. The [OSHA Ebola webpages](#) have multiple resources for both employers and employees.

Summary

Ebola is a very contagious virus that causes severe illness with a high mortality rate. It is creating a lot of fear worldwide because of the severity of the virus. The vast majority of cases are in western Africa where the health care system is substandard and the cultural practices have encouraged families to care for ill loved ones.

Experts agree that Ebola is not foodborne and a widespread outbreak in the US is unlikely.

References:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html>
<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en/>
https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/ebola/control_prevention.html
https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA_FS-3756.pdf

Prepared by:

Hilary Thesmar, PhD, RD, CFS

hthesmar@fmi.org

(202) 220-0658