



Ministry of Health,
Environment &
Sustainability
Cayman Islands Government

Ebola Disease: Frequently Asked Questions

Cayman Islands Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability 24 May 2026



CURRENT SITUATION (May 2026): An outbreak of Ebola disease caused by the Bundibugyo virus has been declared in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda as of 15 May 2026. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared this a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). The Cayman Islands Ministry of Health is monitoring this situation closely. See the last section of this document for what to do if you are concerned.

What is Ebola disease?

Ebola disease is a rare but serious illness caused by a virus. It can be life-threatening and spreads through direct contact with the blood or body fluids of infected people.

There are three known types (species) of Ebola virus that are known to cause large outbreaks:

- Ebola virus: causes Ebola virus disease (EVD). The most common cause of outbreaks.
- Sudan virus: causes Sudan virus disease.
- **Bundibugyo virus: causes Bundibugyo virus disease.** This is the type responsible for the current 2026 outbreak in the DRC and Uganda.

The Ebola virus was first discovered in 1976 in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Outbreaks occur primarily in sub-Saharan Africa.

Prior outbreaks with the Bundibugyo virus have shown a case fatality rate of approximately 30% - 50%.



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What are the symptoms of Ebola disease?

Symptoms usually begin suddenly between 2 and 21 days after infection. Most people develop symptoms within 8 to 10 days.

Illness typically develops in three stages:

Stage 1: Early (days 1–3):

- Fever (the most common first symptom)
- Severe headache
- Fatigue and weakness
- Muscle and joint pain

Stage 2 : Gastrointestinal (days 3–7):

- Diarrhoea and vomiting
- Stomach pain
- Loss of appetite
- Sore throat

Stage 3: Severe (second week, in serious cases):

- Unexplained bleeding or bruising (less common; present in roughly 1 in 10 patients)
- Confusion or neurological symptoms
- Collapse



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How does Ebola spread?

Ebola spreads through direct contact with the blood or body fluids of a person who is sick with, or has died from, Ebola disease. Body fluids include blood, saliva, sweat, vomit, diarrhoea, urine, semen, breast milk, and amniotic fluid.

The virus enters the body through broken skin or mucous membranes (eyes, nose, or mouth).

Common ways Ebola spreads are:

- Caring for or living with someone who is sick with Ebola
- Touching the body of someone who has died from Ebola
- Contact with objects contaminated with body fluids (e.g., bedding, clothing, needles)
- Sexual contact: the virus can remain in semen for more than 12 months after a male survivor has recovered
- Contact with infected animals (e.g., bats, non-human primates) or eating bush meat

Can Ebola spread on a plane?

The risk of contracting Ebola on a plane is very low. People are only infectious once they have symptoms, and a person sick enough to be spreading Ebola would usually be too unwell to travel.

Ebola does not spread through the air. You cannot contract it by sitting near someone on a plane unless you have direct physical contact with their body fluids.

However, if public health authorities determine you were on the same flight as a confirmed or suspected case, they may contact you as part of a precautionary assessment. This does not mean you are infected.





When are people infectious?

People with Ebola are not infectious before symptoms begin. You cannot spread the virus during the incubation period (the time between infection and when symptoms appear).

Patients become progressively more infectious as their illness worsens. The highest viral levels, and therefore the highest risk of transmission, occur in the later stages of illness, when diarrhoea, vomiting, and bleeding are present.

The incubation period is 2 to 21 days. Anyone who has been in contact with a confirmed case should be monitored for 21 days.

Who is most at risk?

- Healthcare and care workers in close contact with Ebola patients without full protective equipment
- Family members or carers providing direct physical care to someone who is ill with Ebola
- People who have handled a body infected with Ebola at a funeral or burial without protective equipment
- People who have recently travelled to an area with an active Ebola outbreak
- People who have had direct contact with animals in areas where Ebola is circulating

How is Ebola diagnosed?

Early Ebola is difficult to diagnose because symptoms such as fever and fatigue are common to many illnesses.

Diagnosis is based on three things:

- Travel history; especially recent travel to an area with an active outbreak
- Symptoms consistent with Ebola disease
- Laboratory testing; blood tests performed in a specialist containment laboratory (Biosafety Level 3). Testing is most accurate once symptoms have been present for at least 3 days.

A negative test in the first 3 days of illness does not reliably rule out Ebola; repeat testing may be needed.





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Is there a treatment for Ebola?

Treatment depends on which type of Ebola virus is causing the illness.

For Bundibugyo and Sudan virus (including the current 2026 outbreak): Supportive care is the main treatment. There are currently no approved antiviral treatments.

Supportive care for all types includes:

- Intravenous fluids to treat dehydration
- Oxygen support
- Management of blood pressure
- Treatment of secondary infections

Early supportive care significantly improves the chances of survival for all types of Ebola.

Is there a vaccine against Ebola?

Vaccines are available, but only against the Ebola virus (Zaire type):

- Ervebo® : a single-dose vaccine, currently held in the global WHO stockpile for outbreak response
- Zabdeno® and Mvabea®: a two-dose regimen

How can I protect myself here at home?

The Ebola outbreak is happening in specific areas within the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As such, the greatest risk comes from travel. **The Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability and the Public Health Department recommend that you avoid travel to the DRC at this time.**



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How can I protect myself if I am travelling to or returning from an affected area?

Travel to the affected area is highly discouraged.

If you are travelling to an affected area:

- Avoid direct contact with anyone who is unwell with possible Ebola symptoms
- Do not touch the blood or body fluids of sick people or deceased persons
- Avoid contact with bats, non-human primates, or bush meat
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water or use alcohol hand gel
- Do not handle clothing, bedding, or equipment that may have been contaminated

If you are returning from an affected area:

- **If you believe you may have been exposed, do not wait for symptoms to develop, contact the Public Health Department immediately.**
- If you are a survivor: use condoms for at least 12 months after recovery, as the virus can persist in semen

What should I do if I was on BA flight 253 on 22 May 2026?

Please complete the passenger information form using the QR code provided to you. This information is needed so that Public Health can follow up with you if necessary. You may be contacted by the Public Health team for a health assessment.

Monitor your health for 21 days from the date of the flight (i.e., until 12 June 2026). If you develop any of the following symptoms, call the Public Health Department immediately, do not go directly to a clinic or hospital without calling first:

- Fever
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Vomiting or diarrhoea
- Unexplained bleeding or bruising

Being on the same flight as a person of concern does not mean you are infected. The risk to the general public remains very low. However, we ask that you cooperate fully with any follow-up from our public health team.



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What is the risk to the Cayman Islands?

CARPHA (Caribbean Public Health Agency) has assessed the risk of Ebola spreading to the Caribbean as low. The Cayman Islands Ministry of Health continues to:

- Monitor international outbreak reports from WHO, CDC, and CARPHA
- Maintain preparedness measures at ports of entry
- Work with our healthcare system to ensure readiness
- Coordinate regional and international response where required

Who should I contact if I am concerned?

If you believe you may have been exposed to Ebola, or if you develop symptoms after travelling to an affected area, contact the Public Health Department immediately:

 **Public Health Department**
(345) 928-7155 or (345) 244-2829
Do not go directly to a clinic or emergency department: call first.

Sources: World Health Organization (WHO) | BMJ Best Practice (updated 21 May 2026) | Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

This document will be updated as the situation develops. For the latest information visit www.gov.ky/health



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