



Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers

Fact Sheet

What are Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers (VHF)?

This refers to a group of illnesses that are caused by several different families of viruses. Many organ systems in the body are affected. While some types of viruses cause relatively mild illness, many of these viruses cause severe, life threatening disease.

Usually people only become infected in areas where the natural hosts live. Occasionally people become infected by a host that has been imported from its native habitat. As more and more people travel, outbreaks will become an increasing threat in places where they have rarely been seen before.

How are they transmitted?

Humans are not the natural host but are infected when they come in contact with an infected animal or insect. Human-to-human contact is possible. Human cases or outbreaks occur from time to time, but cannot be easily predicted. There is no cure or treatment.

Humans can be exposed when they have contact with urine, droppings, or saliva from rodents. Exposure can also occur through mosquito or tick bites. Contact with infected animals and livestock can also cause disease.

What are the symptoms?

Signs and symptoms often include fever, fatigue, dizziness, muscle aches, malaise, headaches, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, weakness, and exhaustion. Severe cases include bleeding under the skin, internally, and from the mouth, eyes, or ears. Shock, nervous system malfunction, delirium, seizures, coma or kidney failure may also occur.

What is the incubation period?

The incubation period ranges from a few days to 2 months.

When is it contagious?

It is not contagious before fever occurs. Infectivity can increase throughout the illness as long as virus is present in blood or body fluids.

How can cases be prevented and controlled?

Prevention includes avoiding contact with infected hosts. No vaccine or specific treatment is available yet.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers, August 2004.
- Heymann, D.L., (2008). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*. (19th Ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

CD-186

2011/04/14

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