

VIRAL HEMORRHAGIC FEVER

What are viral hemorrhagic fevers?

Viral hemorrhagic fevers (VHFs) are a group of illnesses caused by several viruses, mostly found in animals or insects. Ebola, Marburg and Lassa fever are a few examples of VHFs. In general, the term "viral hemorrhagic fever" is used to describe a serious illness in which many organ systems in the body are affected. Viral hemorrhagic fevers have never been reported in the United States.

How can someone come into contact with VHFs?

A person can come into contact with VHFs through—

- Contact with infected animals and animal body fluids;
- Being bitten by infected mosquitoes or ticks; or
- Close contact with an infected person or infected body fluids.

Viral hemorrhagic fevers as weapons: Terrorist groups have attempted to weaponize various agents that cause viral hemorrhagic fever by aerosolizing infected body fluids or rodent excrement.

Please note: Just because you come into contact with VHFs does not mean you will get sick from it.

What happens if someone gets sick from VHFs?

The overall vascular (blood vessel) system is damaged, and the body's ability to regulate itself is damaged. These symptoms are often combined with hemorrhage (bleeding). Specific signs and symptoms change with the type of VHF. The first symptoms often include the following:

- fever
- lack of energy
- dizziness
- muscle aches
- loss of strength
- exhaustion

(Caution: Do not assume that just because a person has cold or flu symptoms that he/she has a viral hemorrhagic fever.)

Patients with serious cases of VHF often show signs of bleeding under the skin, in internal organs, or from the mouth, eyes or ears. Seriously ill patients also may develop shock, nervous system malfunction, coma, confusion and seizures.

Some types of VHF are associated with renal (kidney) failure.

How likely is someone to die from a VHF?

While some types of VHFs cause relatively mild illnesses, many of these viruses cause serious, life-threatening disease.

(Viral hemorrhagic fevers continued)

What is the treatment for VHFs?

- **Prevention of illness after contact:** None
- **Treatment of illness:** There is no treatment or established cure for VHFs. The antiviral drug ribavirin may be of use in treating a subset of VHFs.

People who are sick from VHFs need to be isolated.

Are there vaccines for VHFs?

There are no vaccines currently available.

What should be done if someone comes into contact with a viral hemorrhagic fever?

If you think that you or someone you know may have come into contact with any viral hemorrhagic fever, contact the local county health department right away. (Visit www.idph.state.il.us//local/alpha.htm for a listing of all county health departments in Illinois or check your local phone book.)

If you or someone you know is showing symptoms of viral hemorrhagic fever, call your health care provider or the Illinois Poison Center right away. The toll-free number for the poison center is 1-800-222-1222.

Where can one get more information about viral hemorrhagic fever?

- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/vhf/index.asp
- Illinois Department of Public Health www.idph.state.il.us
- Illinois Poison Center www.IllinoisPoisonCenter.org