

WELCOME BACK!

A member of your family or a friend is returning from an Ebola mission. You want to welcome them back and support them as best you can, but you may also have questions about their return and the risks this might pose.

WHAT WE CAN DO FOR THEM

An Ebola mission is one of the most stressful, exhausting and emotionally challenging missions there is. The work carried out by our teams is exceptional. A warm welcome, along with the recognition and understanding of loved ones, means the world to them.

Although the probability of developing Ebola is ‘virtually zero’, the 21-day monitoring period remains an uncomfortable time during which the person may feel anxious and stressed. Intrusive thoughts about the possibility of infection may arise and be reinforced by their social environment. Providing support during this period is essential.

Rejection by loved ones, despite explanations that the risk is virtually zero, can lead to further feelings of a lack of understanding, sadness and disappointment in the person returning from a mission.

The development of Ebola-like symptoms (most often caused by a cold, flu, etc.) can be a major source of concern for the person returning from a mission. Providing a healthy environment, with the opportunity to rest, eat well and avoid contact with people who are unwell, can help prevent the onset of these unwanted symptoms.

Reliable information on Ebola can be found on the websites of MSF, the WHO, the CDC and your country’s Ministry of Health. It is very important to refer to reliable sources in order to avoid misinformation.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can we give them a hug?

Yes! Ebola is only transmitted through contact with the bodily fluids of a person showing symptoms.

They can resume a normal life (hugs, kisses, etc.) and no additional hygiene measures are required. Hospital isolation is only necessary if Ebola symptoms are present.

Are they at risk of contracting Ebola?

The risk of infection whilst on a mission is virtually zero. Expatriates on Ebola missions follow very strict protocols and wear full protective equipment. An additional assessment is carried out on their return to ensure that there are no known risks.

If the risk is so low, why is a 21-day monitoring period necessary?

The risk is almost zero, but mistakes can always happen. The risk cannot be completely ruled out until 21 days have passed, which is why strict health monitoring is in place during this period.

Why must they remain close to a specific hospital for 21 days?

Lack of sleep, high levels of stress and a heavy workload can make aid workers more vulnerable to other illnesses (flu, colds, etc.). After an Ebola mission, if they develop a fever, this can cause significant anxiety as Ebola must be ruled out quickly. This requires a hospital capable of carrying out Ebola tests, with isolation facilities and an infectious diseases specialist.

Can they have contact with my children?

Yes! In the absence of symptoms, Ebola cannot be transmitted. They can live as normal, share the house, the bathroom and the kitchen, and have physical contact.

What should be done if symptoms develop?

If the person develops symptoms (temperature above 37.5°C, muscle aches, etc.), they must immediately contact the Staff Health department.

Staff Health will guide them through the procedure. It is important to remain calm and to remember that the risk is very low, but that it must be ruled out. All physical contact must be avoided until a medical assessment has been carried out.

Can you have sex with your partner?

Yes! In the absence of symptoms, Ebola is not transmitted through sexual contact.

TRANSMISSION OF EBOLA

- Ebola is not transmitted through the air.
- Transmission occurs only through contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person: urine, vomit, faeces, semen, sweat, tears, saliva and blood.
- People are only infectious when they have symptoms.
- No cases of transmission through casual contact at the onset of symptoms have been documented.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may appear 2 to 21 days after contact with an infected person.

Initial symptoms:

- Sudden onset of fever
- Fatigue and weakness
- Headache
- Muscle and/or joint pain
- Nausea and/or loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Sore throat
- Vomiting
- Diarrhoea

SPECIFIC RULES FOR EBOLA MISSIONS

All staff must follow strict procedures:

- frequent hand disinfection
- wearing protective equipment
- no physical contact
- daily health monitoring

In the event of symptoms or high-risk contact, staff must immediately inform the MSF health coordinator so that specific follow-up measures can be put in place.