



Knowledge for Change

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Appendix 7

Contagious Disease and Epidemic Policy

July 2023

Policy Regarding Outbreaks of Ebola / Marburg Hemorrhagic Fever

General Precautions

General precautions should be used at all times and represent good practice. These include basic infection control measures, hand hygiene and eye protection.

We have taken advice from one of the UK's leading experts in this area (Dr Simon Mardel) and have reproduced this below:

- Marburg is a similar disease to Ebola and is very serious. However, it is very rare and there have been no known cases of students or volunteer health workers in Uganda contracting the disease. This does not mean it won't happen and careful precautions are essential.
- It is contracted via contact with **body fluids ONLY**. This makes it a high 'splash' risk for those engaged in obstetrics, anaesthetics and paediatrics; including doctors, midwives, nurses and cleaning staff. Ebola/Marburg infection can precipitate labour and early labour.
- Incubation takes around 7 days, however 'links' are often missed. This gives rise to the usual assumption that incubation takes 14 days. An outbreak cannot be formally declared over until 2 incubation periods have lapsed (around 6 weeks).
- Testing is possible but only once a person becomes ill. Prior to that, tests are unreliable.
- One of the factors leading to spread involves the staff-staff transmission as one colleague feels obliged to help another. In such cases staff often feel embarrassed / guilty about using recommended precautions such as eye protection (goggles).
- Highly motivated personnel are most at risk – Mission hospital staff are often viewed as the 'canaries' of these diseases – the most dedicated staff are at highest risk as they find it most difficult not to intervene. Loyalty to colleagues can put people in a high risk position.
- In the local community, transmission is often linked to funerals and poor hand hygiene etc.
- Outside of these situations (funerals etc.) **Ebola/Marburg CANNOT be transmitted in public**. You will not catch it from using public spaces, public transport, shaking hands etc.
- **You CANNOT get Ebola/Marburg from someone who is incubating the disease** – only from contact with body fluids of someone who is actually unwell.

Specific Attention to Malaria Risk

Malaria is always a serious risk to the health of students/volunteers. Locals have achieved some degree of immunity as a result of repeated infection and the deaths in their own communities. Western students/volunteers have the same risks as Ugandan babies and pregnant women – your risk cannot be compared to adults. Mortality is much higher in people from the West.

It is essential that you continue to take ALL precautions to avoid contracting malaria. These include using nets (ensuring they are in good condition and are tucked in at night), using anti-mosquito repellents on your skin, covering up with clothing and burning coils outside.

You MUST take anti-malarial prophylaxis. We are aware that some students/volunteers are unhappy about taking this for long periods. Our firm advice is that you must take this during your placement unless you provide us with clear medical advice against this.

Malaria brings with it heightened risk in an Ebola environment. The symptoms of malaria are very similar and if you get them you may be treated as if you have Ebola.

This will cause huge anxiety to your family, friends and colleagues and may lead to containment or quarantine.

It may also result in delayed or inadequate treatment and it may make it very difficult/impossible to repatriate you. Any ONE incident could cost millions of pounds, potentially requiring the services of a private jet. This would have major implications for the individual and organisation.

Failure to take antimalarials, and in doing so contracting malaria, may invalidate a student/volunteer's insurance.

Policy in relation to students / volunteers

K4C and its constituent partnerships are responsible for ensuring that volunteers are working in a risk-minimised environment and in compliance with our insurance regulations.

Students/Volunteers are NOT Ugandan health workers. You are NOT there to provide health services as such. We have no option but to adopt a low threshold perspective.

If there is a confirmed case of Ebola or Marburg in the facility or surrounding area where you are working you MUST avoid any contact whatsoever with body fluids – irrespective of the infection status of the patient. You must adhere to all preventive measures (above).

IF THERE IS A CONFIRMED CASE IN YOUR FACILITY (and until you are advised by K4C that the outbreak is formally over) YOU MUST DESIST FROM CLINICAL WORK IN THAT FACILITY.

Students/volunteers do not have discretion in this matter and you will be in breach of your Elective Placement Agreement and insurance cover if you fail to adhere to this measure. You may wish to communicate this to your Ugandan colleagues. It is not your decision.

If you have any symptoms you are concerned about, please advise K4C staff and professional volunteers immediately and seek medical assistance. Ensure you have oral rehydration at hand.

If you have any concerns about this advice, please contact K4C.

Date of last review: July 2023

Date of next review: July 2024