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# VIRAL HEMORRHAGIC FEVER

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS December 31, 2007

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What is Viral Hemorrhagic Fever and how do people get it?

Viral hemorrhagic fever (or VHF) is the name for the serious illness that results from infection with one of several different virus families. VHF virus infections, particularly those caused by the Ebola and Marburg viruses, can be severe and life-threatening, and are given their name by the fever, exhaustion, and internal bleeding that may occur in its victims.

VHF illness in humans is rare worldwide and extremely rare in the United States. Outbreaks of VHF illness are generally found in Africa, South America, and Asia.

People get VHF illness by touching or breathing in VHF virus. This is called being exposed to VHF. Not everybody who is exposed to VHF will get sick. But many will, and as the VHF viruses multiply inside the body, they can cause very serious illness.

Someone can be exposed by touching the body or body fluids of an infected person, insect, or rodent. It is extremely unlikely that a person in the United States would be exposed to naturally occurring VHF unless they had traveled to an area in Africa, South America, or Asia where people or animals were sick with the virus.

Terrorists could use VHF to hurt people on purpose by releasing a VHF virus in public places.

What if there is a VHF emergency in San Francisco?

The San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) has a plan to respond quickly to a VHF emergency. SFDPH will evaluate the VHF situation and may recommend ways for people to keep themselves and their family safe. SFDPH will also participate in efforts to provide needed medical support and treatment, and to reduce any ongoing sources of VHF virus.

Can I catch VHF from someone?

It depends on the type of VHF virus.

Some types of VHF are contagious (spread from person to person):

- Filoviruses: Ebola and Marburg viruses
- Arenaviruses: Lassa Fever and New World Arenaviruses

Others are spread by contact with infected insects or rodent droppings:

- Bunyaviruses: Rift Valley fever, Crimean-Congo fever
- Flaviviruses: Yellow Fever, Omsk hemorrhagic fever, Kyasanur Forest disease, and Dengue

How can keep from getting sick with VHF?

You can take steps to reduce your risk of getting VHF from another person:

- Stay at least 3 feet away from someone who is sick with VHF
- Do not touch the body or body fluids (vomit, blood, saliva) of someone who is sick with VHF
- Try to avoid contact with others who might have VHF disease
- It is always a good idea to wash your hands regularly and avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth

To reduce your risk of getting VHF from an animal source:

- In areas where VHF is carried by insects: use insect precautions to avoid bites of mosquitoes and ticks (e.g. insect repellent, bed nets, long sleeves/pants)
- Get a yellow fever vaccine before traveling to an area where mosquitoes carry yellow fever virus
- Avoid rodents (mice, rats) and rodent droppings

If terrorists release VHF virus on purpose, check for recommendations from SFPDH.

Is there a medicine to prevent VHF disease?

No. There is no medicine to prevent VHF disease. However if you think you have been exposed, it is important to seek medical treatment immediately.

Is there vaccine (shot) to prevent VHF disease?

Yellow fever is the only VHF for which there is a vaccine. The yellow fever vaccine is available for those traveling to areas of Africa and South America where mosquitoes carry yellow fever virus.

What are the signs of VHF disease?

The signs differ depending on the type of VHF virus. Early on, someone with VHF illness may have a fever (higher than 100.4°F or 38.0°C), feel very tired, feel dizzy, have muscle aches, and feel like they have no strength. Unless you have been in an area where people have been sick with VHF, it is unlikely that these symptoms are related to VHF illness. However, signs such as jaundice (yellow skin & eyes), blood in body fluids (urine, vomit, stool), and bleeding from the mouth, eyes, or ears could indicate serious infection related to VHF.

See a doctor right away if you are having the signs listed above and think you may have been exposed to a VHF virus. You may need medical care.

Is there treatment for VHF disease?

There is one antiviral medicine that may be effective for a few of the VHF diseases. Supportive care, including closely monitoring fluids, is the primary method of treatment.

How can I find information during a VHF emergency?

Check the SFPDH website [www.sfdph.org/cdcp](http://www.sfdph.org/cdcp). Local media such as newspapers, TV stations and radio will carry emergency instructions. Emergency radio stations include: KCBS 740 AM and KGO 810 AM.

What can I do now if I am worried about VHF?

- Read about VHF at [www.sfdph.org/cdcp](http://www.sfdph.org/cdcp) and at the CDC page [www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/vhf](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/vhf)
- Go to [www.72hours.org](http://www.72hours.org) to learn about steps you can take now to prepare for all disasters.
- Keep a card in your wallet with a list of your health problems, the names and doses of medicines you take, and any medicines you are allergic to.