



Viral Hemorrhagic Fever Fact Sheet

What Is Viral Hemorrhagic Fever?

Viral hemorrhagic fevers (VHFs) refer to a group of illnesses that are caused by several distinct families of viruses (arenaviruses, filoviruses, bunyaviruses, and flaviviruses). In general, the term "viral hemorrhagic fever" is used to describe a severe syndrome that affects many organ systems in the body. The circulatory system is damaged, and the body has trouble regulating itself.

How Do You Get It?

The viruses are geographically restricted to the areas where their host species (usually rodents, ticks, and mosquitoes) live. Humans are infected when they come into contact with infected hosts (for example, when a human touches the urine, fecal matter, saliva, or other body excretions from infected rodents; when a mosquito or tick bites a human; or when a human crushes a tick). Also, humans can become infected when they care for or slaughter animals infected with the virus. With some of the viruses (e.g., Ebola, Marburg, Lassa, and Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever viruses), people can pass them to other people through contact with objects touched by infected body fluids (e.g., through contaminated syringes). In rare cases, other viral and bacterial infections can cause VHF; scrub typhus is a good example.

Human cases or outbreaks of VHF caused by these viruses are not easy to predict.

How Dangerous Is Viral Hemorrhagic Fever?

While some types of VHF can cause relatively mild illness, many of these viruses can cause severe disease that leads to death.

What Are the Symptoms?

Specific signs and symptoms vary by the type of VHF, but initial signs and symptoms often include marked fever, fatigue, dizziness, muscle aches, loss of strength, and exhaustion. Patients with severe cases of VHF often show signs of bleeding under the skin, in internal organs, or from body orifices such as the mouth, eyes, or ears. Although they may bleed from many sites around the body, patients rarely die because of blood loss. Severely ill patients may also show shock, nervous system malfunction, coma, delirium, and seizures. Some types of VHF are associated with kidney failure.

How Soon Do Infected People Get Sick?

Depending on the type of VHF, it can range from 2 to 21.

How Is Viral Hemorrhagic Fever Treated?

Patients receive supportive therapy, but usually, there is no other treatment or established cure for VHFs.



**ALAMEDA COUNTY HEALTH CARE SERVICES AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

Can Viral Hemorrhagic Fever Be Prevented?

Except for yellow fever and Argentine hemorrhagic fever, for which vaccines have been developed, no vaccines exist that can protect against these diseases. Therefore, prevention efforts must concentrate on avoiding contact with host species. Because many of the hosts that carry VHF are rodents, disease prevention efforts include:

- controlling rodent populations;
- discouraging rodents from entering or living in homes or workplaces;
- encouraging safe cleanup of rodent nests and droppings.

For VHF spread by insects and spiders, prevention efforts often focus on community-wide control of them and use of insect repellent, proper clothing, bednets, window screens, and other insect barriers to avoid being bitten.

If prevention methods fail and a case of VHF does occur, people should avoid close physical contact with those who are infected and their body fluids, if the virus can be passed on from person to person.

What Should I Do if I Think I *Have* Viral Hemorrhagic Fever?

If you are showing symptoms of viral hemorrhagic fever, call your health care provider right away.

What Should I Do if I Think I Have Been *Exposed* to Viral Hemorrhagic Fever?

If you are showing symptoms of viral hemorrhagic fever, call your health care provider right away.

Excerpted from the CDC website: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/vhf/index.asp>