

Follow-up of humanitarian workers returning from ebola affected area

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Purpose

The Health Security Committee and the ECDC have recently raised awareness at member states about the procedures adopted by (humanitarian) organisations concerning the follow-up of their humanitarian workers returning from Ebola affected areas.

Therefore, the Belgian State, through the Ebola coordination team of the Federal Public Service of Health, Food Chain Security and Environment has decided to review and harmonize the procedures that these organisations have in place for their humanitarian workers who reside (either temporarily or permanently) in Belgium during the 21 days following a mission in an Ebola affected country.

Objectives

The goals of this document are to :

- provide a template of a follow-up procedure;
- harmonize the procedures in place in every (humanitarian) organisation;
- prepare the said organisations to make their workers aware of the procedures of the Belgian National Ebola plan, in case they become ill.

Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge the kind and valuable support, provided to us, by MSF Belgium who has accepted to share with us their procedures. Their document has served as a basis for the writing of the procedure at hand.

Medical follow-up after a mission in an Ebola affected country.

If you return from an 'Ebola mission', you are kindly requested to adhere to the following procedure during the 21 days following your last day in the affected area.

What is an Ebola mission ?

An Ebola mission is a mission which takes place in an Ebola affected area according to the WHO list of affected countries. As of December 12, 2014, the WHO recognizes three Ebola affected countries : Guinea Conakry, Sierra Leone and Liberia. This list may be subject to change.

Important Reminder on Ebola transmission

Ebola is transmitted through contact with an ill person. Only a person with symptoms of illness (fever, diarrhoea, vomiting ...) can transmit Ebola to another person whom he/she has contact with or via objects (clothes, towels, sheets) soiled by body fluids of ill person.

Why monitor for 21 days after mission ?

The maximum incubation period of the disease is 21 days (i.e. the period during which the virus could develop the disease, if the virus was transmitted to you). This means that if, without your knowledge, you had contact with an infected person during the last day of work, it could be that you are infected even if you don't show any symptoms.

If you do not develop any symptoms during 21 days, you are not infected with ebola.

If you develop fever after the 21-day-period, that is not due to Ebola.

Preparation for monitoring

The monitoring itself will start after your arrival in Belgium, but you need to make some arrangements before your arrival.

Before your arrival

Prior to your return, you must inform your headquarters of :

- any incident occurred during the mission (even if it seems to have no importance);
- the date and hour of your departure flight as well as the ones of every stopover and finally the date and hour of arrival at your final destination. The organisation can provide this information to the Belgian Federal Public Service of Health via the following mail address: vigilance.sanitaire@health.belgium.be and ebola@health.belgium.be.

In case you had an incident during your mission, the organisation headquarters will have to inform the Belgian Federal Public Service of Health of your passage or stay in Belgium (see contacts below).

At the airport of departure, you will undergo an exit screening, consisting of a questionnaire and a temperature check. Be sure to provide all relevant information concerning your stay and your eventual exposure during the mission. This may be essential information in case you would become ill.

When arriving in Belgium

Prior to landing you will have to fill in a passenger locator card.

At your arrival at Brussels airport, you will undergo another temperature check. In case your temperature is above 38°C (100.4° F), you will be referred to the health care authorities of the airport for further investigation.

In case you are not a transit passenger but stay in Belgium, you will have to monitor yourself and, eventually, follow some containment measures. This will take place under the supervision of your organisation and with the support of the Belgian Federal Public Service of Health.

Monitoring

The monitoring itself will depend on your level of exposure during the mission. This level of exposure is divided into two major groups. The person or department in charge of the occupational health within the organisation you work for, will decide to which group you belong and hence to which protocol you need to adhere to.

Please find below a table resuming the groups and respective protocols.

	GROUP 1 (LOW RISK OF EXPOSURE)	GROUP 2 (MEDIUM OR HIGH RISK OF EXPOSURE)
Description	<p>You have worked in an Ebola treatment center without any contact with Ebola patients.</p> <p>You had contacts with Ebola patients wearing the appropriate PPE.</p>	<p>You had contacts with Ebola patients without wearing the appropriate PPE.</p> <p>You have accidentally been exposed while giving care to Ebola patients, despite the fact that you were wearing the appropriate PPE</p>
Containment measure during the monitoring period	<p>No movement restriction</p> <p>Be advised to stay less than 4 hours away from a hospital, to assure access to suitable hospital care (presence of a specialist in infectious diseases, who is able to start up treatment if you develop a fever).</p>	<p>Stay in isolation, or, at least, close to your home or temporary residence.</p> <p>Avoid social contacts (meeting, concert, etc.).</p> <p>It is not recommended to go on holiday.</p>
Monitoring	<p>Take your temperature (in the armpit) twice a day (with an interval of 12 hours in between), with a thermometer for strictly personal use.</p> <p>Register the measurements in a log book.</p> <p>Observe and log the prevalence of any suspected symptoms which can be related to Ebola</p> <p>As soon as you start to feel the onset of fever (> 38 °C, 100.4 °F) or any other symptom related to Ebola, you must <u>contact the person in charge of the follow-up in your organisation</u>, who will warn the health surveillance cell of the Federal Public Service of Health via: +32(0) 476.605.605 or vigilance.sanitaire@sante.belgique.be</p>	<p>Take your temperature (in the armpit) twice a day (with an interval of 12 hours in between), with a thermometer for strictly personal use.</p> <p>Report the measurements daily to the person in charge of the follow-up in your organisation.</p> <p>Observe and log the prevalence of any suspected symptoms which can be related to Ebola</p> <p>As soon as you start to feel the onset of fever (> 38 °C, 100.4 °F) or any other symptom related to Ebola, you must <u>contact the person in charge of the follow-up in your organisation</u>, who will warn the health surveillance cell of the Federal Public Service of Health via: +32(0) 476.605.605 or vigilance.sanitaire@sante.belgique.be</p>
Evacuation	<p>In case you start to feel any Ebola related symptoms, you will be referred to the Belgian health authorities who will organise your transfer to a reference hospital for treatment as well perform contact tracing in collaboration with your organisation.</p>	

Important reminder to humanitarian workers

As long as you do not have any symptoms, you can have a perfectly normal life. Your family, your friends can be assured that you are not contagious and therefore not dangerous to them.

You can return to work and perform your normal duties in accordance to the guidelines given by the person or department in charge of the occupational health within the organisation you work for .

Though you are not a danger to others as long as you do not have a fever or signs of disease, others are a potential danger to you. By having a lot of contact with others (large crowds), or if you are in contact with patients, you may catch a different disease (angina, bronchitis, flu etc.), which might cause fever and hence might cause stress until it is clear you have not been infected with ebola.

Advice during the 21 days following an ebola mission

- Have a good rest.
- Continue Malaria chemo-prophylaxis.
- Adapt your lifestyle to avoid getting sick.

Practicalities

During these 21 days, make sure to store the following items permanently and easily accessible in your place of residence:

- a functioning thermometer;
- a phone with the mobile number of the responsible of the organisation;
- the address of the hospital, where you will go, if you have a fever.

Please make sure to arrange means of transport in case you would need to present yourself at the emergency department of a (reference)hospital. In case of emergency, you can call the emergency number 112 – make sure to mention you call for a possible ebola infection.

If you have any questions about your health, do not hesitate to call the organisation.

Contacts : _____