



Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers

What are viral hemorrhagic fevers?

Viral hemorrhagic fevers (VHFs) refer to a group of illnesses that are caused by several distinct families of viruses including Ebola, Marburg, Lassa and Crimean-Congo. In general, the term "viral hemorrhagic fever" is used to describe a severe multisystem syndrome. Multisystem means that multiple organ systems in the body are affected.

What are the symptoms of VHF?

Initial signs and symptoms often include high 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 like the mouth, eyes, or ears. Severely ill patient cases may also show shock, nervous system malfunction, coma, delirium, and seizures. Some types of VHF are associated with kidney failure.

How soon do symptoms appear after infection occurs?

In general, symptoms appear between 2 and 21 days from exposure.

How are VHFs spread?

VHF viruses are transmitted when humans have contact with body excretions from infected rodents. The viruses associated with arthropod hosts are spread most often when an infected mosquito or tick bites a human, or when a human crushes a tick.

Some viruses that cause hemorrhagic fever can spread from one person to another. This type of secondary transmission of the virus can occur directly, through close contact with infected people or their body fluids. It can also occur indirectly, through contact with infected objects.

How are VHFs treated?

There is no treatment for VHFs, generally patients receive supportive therapy. Some anti-viral drugs have been effective.

How can you prevent VHFs?

With the exception of yellow fever and Argentine hemorrhagic fever, no vaccine exists that can protect against these diseases. Therefore, prevention efforts must concentrate on avoiding contact with host species. If prevention methods fail and a case of VHF does occur, efforts should focus on preventing further transmission from person to person. Many of the hosts that carry hemorrhagic fever viruses are rodents.

Disease prevention efforts include:

- Control rodent populations
- Do not allow rodents to enter or live in homes or workplaces
- Encourage safe cleanup of rodent nests and droppings.

For hemorrhagic fever viruses spread by arthropod vectors, prevention efforts often focus on community-wide insect and arthropod control. People are encouraged to use insect repellent, proper clothing, bed nets, window screens, and other insect barriers to avoid being bitten.

For those hemorrhagic fever viruses that can be transmitted from one person to another:

- Avoid close physical contact with infected people and their body fluids
- Properly use, disinfect, and dispose of instruments and equipment used in treating or caring for patients with VHF.

How can I get more information about VHFs?

For more information on VHFs or any other health issues, call the Sedgwick County Public Health Incident Planning and Response (PHIPR) at (316) 660-5551 or visit www.sedgwickcounty.org.