

Viral Hemorrhagic Fever

What is viral hemorrhagic fever (VHF)?

Viral hemorrhagic fever refers to a group of illnesses caused by four distinct families of viruses. These viruses cause severe illness in several organ systems. Some types of hemorrhagic fever viruses can cause relatively mild illnesses and others cause severe, life-threatening disease. VHFs cause damage to blood vessels which can result in bleeding.

Examples of VHFs include Ebola, Marburg, and Lassa hemorrhagic fevers.

How common is viral hemorrhagic fever?

Outbreaks of hemorrhagic fevers occur irregularly and cannot be easily predicted.

The viruses that cause hemorrhagic fever are spread throughout the globe. Because each virus is associated with one or more particular host species, the virus and the disease it causes are usually seen only where the host species lives. Some hosts are restricted to a certain area, while others live throughout a continent or the world. Due to global trading, it is possible for a host to be shipped to anywhere.

How is viral hemorrhagic fever spread?

The viruses that cause hemorrhagic fever are usually carried in rodents, ticks, or mosquitoes. Some VHF viruses can be transmitted from person to person through direct close contact with body fluids.

The viruses in rodent carriers are transmitted when a human has contact with urine, fecal matter, saliva, or other body fluids from infected rodents. The virus from mosquitoes and ticks are transmitted when humans are bitten or kill them.

What are the symptoms of viral hemorrhagic fever?

Specific signs and symptoms vary by the type of hemorrhagic fever. Generally, initial symptoms include high fever, fatigue, dizziness, muscle aches, and exhaustion. Patients with severe cases often have signs of bleeding under the skin, in internal organs, or from body openings like the mouth, eyes, or ears. Other severe symptoms include shock, nervous system malfunction, coma, delirium, and seizures. Some types of VHF are associated with kidney failure.

What is the treatment for viral hemorrhagic fever?

Generally, there is no treatment or cure for hemorrhagic fevers. Patients receive supportive care. In the case of a few viruses, an anti-viral drug may be helpful.

Are there complications from viral hemorrhagic fever?

In severe cases of hemorrhagic fever, death can occur. Patients rarely die from blood loss. Instead, death is due to the failure of vital organs, such as the kidneys.

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How can viral hemorrhagic fever be prevented?

With the exception of two viruses, there are no vaccines available. Prevention efforts include avoiding contact with host species: controlling the population of rodents, ticks, and mosquitoes and keeping them from entering living spaces.

If human infection does occur, avoid close physical contact with the infected person and their body fluids unless wearing protective clothing. Also, be careful to properly use, disinfect, and dispose of instruments and equipment used in the treatment of infected patients.

How do I get more information on viral hemorrhagic fever?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/vir/fvr/vir/fvr.htm>

World Health Organization

Website: http://www.who.int/health_topics/haemorrhagic_fever_viral/en/

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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