



NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Division of the National Health Laboratory Service

MARBURG VIRUS KEY FACTS

Marburg virus disease (MVD) is caused by a filovirus named Marburg virus (MARV). It is a very rare disease which is transmitted from certain species of bats (and possibly other animals) to a person after which person-to-person transmission is possible through close, direct contact with a person who has developed the signs and symptoms of the disease.

The disease was diagnosed in South Africa in a tourist and two hospital-based contact in 1975. Sporadic outbreaks of the disease has been reported in different African countries. In September 2024, MVD outbreak was reported in Rwanda, primarily affecting healthcare professionals. As of 20 January 2025, Tanzania has declared an outbreak of MVD in the north-western Kagera region, with one laboratory-confirmed case.

The risk of spread of MVD internationally is considered low. The World Health Organization has not issued any travel or trade restrictions to Tanzania.

1. How is MARV transmitted?

Through human-to-human transmission by direct, and very close contact with blood or bodily fluids of infected persons and with surfaces and materials (e.g. bedding, clothing) contaminated with these fluids. Therefore during outbreaks, mostly healthcare workers and other care givers are affected.

2. What are the signs and symptoms of MVD?

The incubation period for MVD varies between two and 21 days (this is the time following exposure until the first signs and symptoms of the disease develop). The disease is marked by acute onset of generalised signs and symptoms such as fatigue, nausea, vomiting, dehydration and rash. Patients often have very severe diarrhoea. Typically, the disease develops quickly, and patients require hospitalisation.

3. How is MVD managed?

Currently there are no registered vaccines or antiviral treatments approved for MVD. Patients with MVD are managed symptomatically and supportively. This includes rehydration with oral or intravenous fluids – and treatment of specific symptoms.

4. How are suspected cases managed?

When MVD is suspected, the patient will be isolated in hospital to provide appropriate management and to prevent further spread of the infection.

Individuals who may have had contact with an MVD case will be traced and monitored for signs and symptoms compatible with MVD for 21 days to ensure rapid detection of suspected cases and implementation of mitigation measures to limit further spread.

1. What to do if you have MVD symptoms?

Visit your healthcare provider and share your concerns. MVD can be investigated by laboratory testing which is performed at the NICD.

2. Where can I find more information?

Facts about Marburg virus disease are available: <https://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/marburg/>