

## **Ebola in the Winter Months**

The 2014 Ebola Outbreak is by far the worst Ebola outbreaks in world history, effecting vast regions of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, with isolated cases reported throughout the Western World, including the United States. The latest report from the World Health Organization dated November 28th lists 16,899 reported cases of Ebola resulting 5,987 confirmed deaths. In addition to the thousands of patients, 592 health care workers have contracted Ebola as a direct result of caring for the infected... 333 have died.

Due to the high mortality rate resulting from the symptoms, the high publicity of this disease, coupled with a few cases reported in the United States, the fear of contracting Ebola through everyday interaction and activities has gripped the public. Furthermore, as temperatures are plummeting throughout most of the country as we are getting ready for a long and snowy winter, the fear is exacerbated.

First and foremost, here are the facts: Ebola is a virus that is transmitted through direct contact, blood or any other secreted bodily fluids. Coughing and sneezing has not been proven to be an effective method of spreading the virus, however, in most cases, the Ebola sufferer will secrete copious amounts of bodily fluids via bleeding, projectile vomiting and diarrhea. Coming in contact with any of those fluids risks contamination and contraction of the disease. Ebola's incubation period is between 3 and 21 days after exposure, making it a relatively difficult disease to diagnose.

Sudden, prolonged exposures to cold temperatures can weaken the immune system, making an individual more likely to contract a cold or flu during the dry, cold winter months. It is always a good idea to take extra care to fortify our immune system with extra vitamins during the winter.

However, as far as the specific increased risk of contracting Ebola during the winter months, the likelihood is fairly unlikely. The truth is, the United States has only had a few cases reported. Most of these cases were a direct result of contact with a patient from the affected African regions, or contact with a medical professional who contracted the disease while in Africa.

The US Center for Disease Control has been keeping a close eye on all of these cases. There have not been any reported cases in the United States since.

Overall, it is highly unlikely to contract Ebola in the United States while going about your regular business. The likelihood of contracting Ebola while going to work, school, gym and participating in social activities in the United States is so slim, the difference between the likelihood in summer versus winter is negligible.

Although Ebola may not be your biggest worry, be sure to take steps to fortify your system during the winter months — there are plenty of less serious, but fairly nasty bugs lurking around, ready to attack a compromised immune system this winter!

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