

Ebola virus: What to do when an employee is about to travel to Uganda or another affected country?

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These past few weeks, the World Health Organization (WHO) has expressed concern regarding an outbreak of the Ebola virus in Uganda. While this is now the fifth wave of this virus to hit the country, current victims do not appear to respond to vaccines quite as well as in the past. The responsible strain therefore presents a very high mortality rate, ranging between 90 and 100%.

The article below was first published during a previous outbreak of the virus in 2014, and was updated to address the current situation in 2022. We recommend that you keep an eye on the [Public Health Agency of Canada's latest guidelines](#).

What is Ebola?

Ebola is an hemorrhagic fever. Its incubation period lasts between 2 to 21 days. Contamination is possible as soon as the first symptoms arise and the risk lasts as long as the virus is present in an individual's blood. Inter-human transmission can occur through direct contact with infected blood or other bodily fluids, or by touching an object soiled with the same secretions.

Providing health care, participating to funeral rites and having sexual contacts with an infected person carry the most risks when it comes to contracting the virus. As well, consuming wild animals' meat or being in contact with infected animals may also expose humans to the virus.

Recommended measures for employers

As an employer, how should you react when an employee announces that they have made travel plans to a country at risk?

It should be noted that no case of an Ebola virus infection has been identified in Canada as of publication date. However, the employer can take action to protect the workplace when an employee returns from visiting an affected area.

Since the incubation period of 21 days is significant, preventive measures will help to ensure the employee will not lose pay, nor have to exhaust their accrued time-off days.

1. Before departure

- Check with the employee as to their itinerary and date of return on Canadian soil.
- Provided the employee's functions allow it, establish a work-at-home agreement for their first few days back on Canadian soil and provide them with the tools necessary to perform their functions.
- Inform the employee that they must follow the guidelines for symptom self-monitoring for 21 days following their return, including taking their temperature daily, and make the employee's commitment to this agreement a condition for returning to the workplace.
- Advise the employee not to report to work if they have a fever or show other symptoms (such as muscle aches, a headache or sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, a rash, bleeding gums, etc.) Visit the [WHO's page about Ebola](#) to learn more.
- Notify the employee that they will have to leave the workplace in case of a sudden onset of fever or other symptoms during the day.
- Notify the employee that if they seem feverish, they will not have access to the workplace until a medical certificate attests their fitness.

2. Upon returning

- Remind the employee of their commitment to self-monitor, and that access to the workplace will be denied them in case of a fever.
- Direct the employee to health services in case of a fever or the appearance of other symptoms.

3. General preventive measures, actionable immediately

- It is desirable to modify vacation application forms so that employees disclose their travel destination, to facilitate preventive measures before and after their return.
- Likewise, if the employer authorizes employees to work from abroad, the teleworking policy should include a duty to divulge any change in location and any location visited while working abroad, at least 30 days prior to the employee's return to the employer's establishment.

If your organization provides health care or works with vulnerable or immunocompromised persons, additional precautionary measures may be necessary.

Contact the [BLG Labour and Employment Law Group](#) for assistance with planning and deploying adequate preventive measures, or regarding any other concern you may have as an employer.

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