

Much has been reported recently on the growing threat of the Ebola virus in western Africa. Our Site Director in Namibia has been monitoring the situation carefully, and this is his report:

Although alerts to port health authorities in both South Africa and Namibia are issued to look for travelers arriving from affected countries, the risk of Ebola spreading to Southern Africa is "very low" according to South Africa's National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).

Reasons they cite include:

1. The distance between Southern Africa (Namibia and South Africa) where the CGE program runs and the countries affected is approximately the distance between Florida and Washington states in the US. Traveling between the affected countries and Southern Africa is only possible via Airports.
2. The risk of infection for travelers is generally low since most human infections result from direct contact with the body fluids or secretions of infected patients, particularly in hospitals and as a result of unsafe procedures, use of contaminated medical devices and unprotected exposure to contaminated body fluids.
3. The National Departments of Health in Namibia and South Africa are monitoring the situation at all ports of entry in Namibia and South Africa and not just airports. Port Health officials based at airports are on alert and are monitoring current processes in place. At the OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, the major entry point to Southern Africa, passengers have to walk underneath an Infrared Fever Screening System. The system uses Passive Infrared Imaging technology that provide thermographs of anyone wanting to enter the country. If a passenger's temperature is too high (which might indicate a fever), they will be quarantined. A fever is one of the early-onset symptoms of Ebola. In the event that a passenger does trip the alert, there are also processes in place to deal with potentially infected passengers. The airport has a quarantine facility in an event passengers are required to be held in isolation prior to being transferred for further treatment.
4. Guinea and its neighbors are not tourist destination for South Africans and Namibians.

Given these facts, Ebola therefore poses a very low risk for travelers to Southern Africa. We will continue to monitor the situation and provide information if needed.



Ebola outbreak in Guinea

At least 59 people have died after contracting a mystery illness in Guinea since early February. Of the dead, 13 have been confirmed as Ebola cases.

■ Affected districts ■ Areas under Investigation



Sources: Reuters; World Health Organisation

