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BY TONNY ABET

Ebola Bundibugyo Virus Disease is a rare but dangerous form of Ebola, with 30-50 percent of the infected people dying in the past outbreaks. Health experts warn that the disease often begins deceptively, with symptoms that can be mistaken for common illnesses.

Prof Pontiano Kaleebu, the director of Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI), says the infection with the Ebola Bundibugyo strain manifests almost the same way as other strains of Ebola viruses.

"These are viral hemorrhagic fever viruses. They start with symptoms that are not very specific, and that's why sometimes we miss these patients," Prof Kaleebu explains.

"Somebody comes, fatigue, fever, sore throat, and all that. Somebody could confuse it with any other disease - malaria and the rest."

Due to this challenge, the World Health Organisation (WHO) advises that people with Ebola disease-like symptoms seek advice immediately from a health-care provider.

"Testing is the first step in identifying accurately what is causing illness and is essential for providing the right treatment. Early testing and treatment save lives and protect community and family members, including local health and care workers," the WHO states.

Dr Tonny Musoke Sekikongo, a consultant physician at Mulago Hospital Ebola Treatment Unit, and chair of case management in Ebola response, sheds more light on how the symptoms manifest from the time of exposure to the disease progresses.

Dr Musoke says that although some people who are exposed to Ebola patients may not develop the disease (be-

What you need to know about Ebola Bundibugyo

come sick), treatment should be provided early to prevent death among those who become sick.

Delayed symptom, asymptomatic patients

Dr Musoke says even with contact, the risk of infection or onset of the symptoms may vary depending on the quantity of virus in the contaminant and the immunity of the person.

Once somebody has been exposed, they don't develop symptoms immediately. "It takes some time as the infectious agent moves from the area of exposure to the bloodstream and then starts to multiply," explains Dr Musoke.

"So at the end of a critical mass, if a critical mass has been achieved, then we shall begin to see symptoms developing," he adds.

HOW TO REPORT CASES

To report a suspected case of Ebola, call the Ministry of Health hotline immediately on 0800-100-066 or send an alert SMS on 6767 or U-Report on 8500. The Ministry of Health has reported 15 infections (Records below).

Ebola Bundibugyo has an incubation period of 2-21 days, according to experts. "So that period between exposures to the time when somebody starts to experience symptoms, we refer to it as the incubation period," he explains.

According to a 2017 report by Prof Judith R Glynn, on the Sierra Leone Ebola outbreak, about 2-6 percent (10 of 388) "of asymptomatic members of Ebola-affected households had evidence of Ebola virus infection."

According to the WHO, transmission of the virus starts when people start showing symptoms.

But the global health agency and the



A health worker is dressed up in personal protective equipment at the Evangelical Medical Centre in DR Congo on May 31. PHOTO/REUTERS

Ministry of Health direct that all contacts of EVD patients should be quarantined so that they are monitored closely for 21 days, and those who turn positive are treated immediately to prevent death.

"If you or someone you know has these symptoms, call our toll-free number immediately. When an individual reports early, the chances of survival are high," states Dr Charles Oloro, the director general of Health Services in Uganda.

Symptom progression after infection

Prof Kaleebu says after initial symptoms such as fatigue, fever, and sore throat, "patients can progress to gastro (stomach) symptoms where people start vomiting and experiencing diarrhoea."

Dr Musoke explains more. "These symptoms usually have an order in which they will present, depending on the number of days from the start of symptomatology," he says.

Besides the early symptoms mentioned by Prof Kaleebu, Dr Musoke says a patient may also experience severe headache, muscle pains and reddening of the eyes.

"Once in a while, you might have diarrhoea, but mild and vomiting, but mild. But as the days progress, usually going past four days, then we begin to see other symptoms coming in and with more severity," he adds.

"So we can have severe sore throats coming in. You can have chest pain, abdominal pain. Then you have diarrhoea and vomiting," he adds.

He says the stomach and intestinal issues then come in. "These gastrointestinal symptoms, including hiccups and epigastric pains, are severe and usually lead to complications.

Dr Musoke says that later, there is unexplained bleeding in about 30 percent of the infected individuals.

"And even then when it comes, it's a very late sign and it is a poor prognostic factor. Then we have issues like skin rash, people getting into respiratory distress, shock, multi-organ failure, and then other complications like coma and seizures," he reveals.

"Those who go on to have these late clinical signs and symptoms, it's usually associated with a very poor prognosis. The only chance we have to prevent them from going into these late signs and symptoms is if we start management of these patients early," he adds.