



# How to Talk with your Children about Ebola

With so much about Ebola in the news, chances are your children have heard about it. You can help your children understand what is happening here in the United States and in West Africa by talking with them directly. Not talking about Ebola can make it seem even scarier to a child. You can tailor these ideas for your child's age, development, and concerns.

## Ask your children: What have you heard about Ebola?

- Listen for underlying fears or concerns and misinformation your children might have. For example, children may ask if it is possible for them to catch Ebola. Reassure them that in the United States, very few people have caught Ebola from someone else. Those who have were nurses taking care of patients with Ebola who were very sick -- and a person with Ebola must be really sick to be able to spread the virus to others.
- Don't make it a one-time conversation. Continue to talk with your children and answer any new questions they may have about Ebola.
- Limit your children's exposure to news reports and other media. Children see a lot of information on the internet, television, and social media. Nonstop exposure makes the risk seem bigger than it is.



## Gently correct inaccurate information.

- If your children have incorrect information about Ebola, give the correct information clearly, using words they understand.
- To check facts about Ebola, use reliable sources, such as the [CDC website](#), your pediatrician, or the health department.
- Remind your children that they shouldn't be afraid to play with friends or classmates who may have been to Africa or have names that may sound different.



## Answer their questions about Ebola in ways that will reassure, not scare them.

- Keep your answers simple and direct.
- Carefully think about what answers you can give that will reassure your children and relieve their worries about Ebola. For example, tell your children that even though a lot of people are talking about Ebola, very few people in all of the United States have actually gotten sick with Ebola.
- Give your children practical advice to help them stay healthy. For example, this is a good time to remind them how important it is for them to wash their hands, especially before eating and after touching someone or something that may not be clean.



## Allow your children to express their feelings and help them cope.

- If they feel worried, they are worried. Don't tell them they shouldn't be worried. Instead, encourage them to talk about how they are feeling.
- Be a good role model for your children by telling them about your concerns. Do this in a way that won't scare them. For example, you might tell them that when you heard about Ebola in West Africa, you felt sad for the families of people who got sick or died of Ebola.
- Tell your children how you dealt with your feelings and then help them figure out what they might try to comfort themselves. You could start by talking about things that worked in the past when your children were worried about something else. For example: writing in their journal, spending time with a pet, or playing soccer.
- Maintain your normal, healthy routines. Make sure your children get enough rest, physical activity, and eat healthy foods.



# How to answer your children's questions about Ebola

Here are some questions children may ask and some possible answers. Children may react differently depending on their age and level of development. For younger children, it is particularly important to keep your answers simple and direct. But even for older children, who may be confused or worried, it is best to start simply. Then ask them what further information they would like.

## Is it true Ebola is killing lots of people?

Ebola is a serious illness. Scientists are working to make medicines that can cure people who get Ebola or a vaccine that they can give to healthy people so they don't catch it, but we don't have them yet. But we do know a lot about how to keep people from catching Ebola and doctors in the United States can do a lot to help people with Ebola get better. There aren't as many doctors and hospitals in some countries in Africa. So in Africa, people with Ebola often don't get to the hospital until they are very sick or don't get to go at all, and many of them have died. There have been very few people who have caught Ebola in the United States.

## Can I catch Ebola?

Ebola doesn't spread from one person to another unless the person who has Ebola is feeling sick – they may have a high fever, throw up, have diarrhea or a bad stomach ache, or have a very bad headache. *(For older children: the Ebola virus lives in blood and other body fluids, such as urine, feces, saliva, vomit, sweat or semen – for someone to catch the disease, one of these fluids from someone who is sick and has the Ebola virus has to get through a break in the skin or enter through the mouth, eyes or nose of the other person).* If someone is feeling well, they don't spread Ebola virus to other people. The virus doesn't spread through the air, water or food. The few people that caught Ebola in the United States are people at the hospital that took care of very sick patients with Ebola.

## How do I know if I have Ebola?

The symptoms of Ebola, such as fever, vomiting, diarrhea, or stomach ache are very common in children and adults. Almost all of the time, they are not caused by Ebola. Unless you have been around someone who was sick with Ebola, you do not need to worry about having Ebola. But if you feel sick or are worried you are getting sick, please let me know.

## What can I do so I don't catch Ebola?

Even though Ebola is very rare in the United States, it's always a good idea to find out how to keep healthy. Make sure you wash your hands before eating, touching your mouth, eyes, or nose, or after touching someone who is sick. Don't touch blood or body fluids of someone else – call an adult to clean up blood or vomit.

If children ask you a question that you don't know how to answer, look to reliable sources of information, such as the CDC website, your pediatrician, or the health department. Older children may wish to look for the answers along with you. Let children know that the government, doctors, and health departments are taking steps to try to keep everyone well.

For more information on how to help your children cope with disasters or how to explain death to young children and help children of any age adjust to a loss, visit the [American Academy of Pediatrics website](#) and [CDC's Caring for Children in a Disaster website](#).

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