

Ships pose bigger risk of 'importing' Ebola than airports

Ships arriving from West Africa pose a bigger threat of importing Ebola cases than flights into Cape Town International Airport from those countries according to SA's health authorities.



The Ebola virus that is spreading in West Africa may reach South Africa's shores via infected sailors working on board ships that stop at SA's ports. Image: [ThisIs50](#)

This is the worst Ebola outbreak in recorded history and it is occurring in West Africa. By 4 August 1,711 people had the disease and already 932 of them have died," said the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Authorities in SA have stepped up surveillance at ports of entry, including harbours and airports.

"Everyone is worried about the airport, but my worry is the harbour," Western Cape Manager for Environmental and Port Health Ewald Bonzet told delegates at a Tygerberg Hospital symposium. The facility has been designated by the Western Cape health department as the referral facility for suspected Ebola cases.

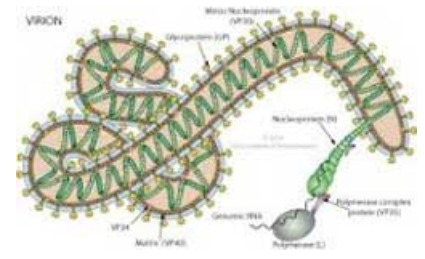
Ships are required to apply for quarantine clearance, or "free pratique", from port authorities three days before their expected arrival, but Bonzet said he was concerned that illnesses could arise after the authority to berth had been granted.

He has asked shipping agents to liaise closely with vessels and notify port health authorities of any illness on board.

Ships may carry infected sailors

"Ships from West Africa typically took between 8 and 12 days to reach Cape Town, so it was likely that crew or passengers infected with Ebola would show signs of illness by the time they reached these shores," he said.

"Ebola takes between two and 21 days to incubate, but most people develop symptoms within seven to ten days," said Tygerberg Infectious Disease Specialist Jantjie Taljaard. Virologist Wolfgang Preiser told doctors and nurses in an overflowing lecture hall that preparation for cases arriving in South Africa was vital.



An image of the Ebola virus under a microscope. Image: [Virology](#)

"We want to be safe from the start rather than sorry if the disease enters the country," he said, emphasising that healthcare workers in SA had the tools to take appropriate precautions and prevent the spread of this disease.

he said that by contrast, doctors and nurses in West Africa were severely hampered by the region's scant health infrastructure.

WHO said at the weekend that the West African Ebola outbreak was spreading faster than it could be controlled. Most of the cases have been in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, countries that have no previous experience with the disease and poor health infrastructure.

The majority of cases have been in remote areas, increasing the challenges of containing the outbreak.

Nigeria has confirmed five new cases of Ebola since a Liberian man infected with the virus arrived in Lagos last week.

The natural host of the Ebola virus is the African fruit bat, which can pass the Ebola virus on to animals such as

chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys, antelope or porcupines. People become infected when handling the meat from these animals.

Source: Business Day via I-Net Bridge

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