

Ebola and the Law Enforcement Canine

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Given the recent introduction and transmission of Ebola within the United States, several agencies have inquired about canine exposure and health considerations that this virus may present. This is particularly important as this virus has potential applications as a WMD as it is considered a Category A bioterrorism agent. Following is a brief overview of the virus and what is known about its association with animals- specifically canines. This is derived from a search of the currently available literature, as well as from conversations with informed personnel. References include but are not limited to the: AVMA, CDC, USPCA Poison Control and the NIH. This paper is NOT to be considered a definitive resource and any **POTENTIAL** exposure or question regarding definitive protocols should be directed to the appropriate local, state, or federal veterinary and public health officials.

Ebola in people

Ebola is a virus. The incubation time from exposure until symptoms appear in people is 2-21 days (average 8-10 days). The virus cannot be transmitted to another person until symptoms appear in the infected individual. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain, and unexplained bleeding. *(It is important to note that many of these signs are present for much more common diseases such as the Flu).* Ebola is spread through **direct** contact with the bodily fluid (ie. Vomit, blood, sweat, urine, feces) of a symptomatic person. Currently there is no evidence of airborne spread of this virus although the virus may remain viable for varying times on inanimate objects such as contaminated clothing, medical supplies, etc. Currently there is no approved vaccine for ebola, nor is there a specific treatment; rather treatment is symptomatic. Early initiation of treatment is associated with higher survival and the current mortality rate reported from West Africa is approximately 70%.

Ebola in Law Enforcement Canines.

Currently, there are no reports of dogs becoming sick with the Ebola virus- including dogs in areas of Africa where the Ebola epidemic is occurring. Further, there are no reports in the literature of dogs spreading Ebola to people or other animals. ***Because of this, there is no information available describing likely signs of exposure in the dog.*** Given the totality of the scientific evidence currently available it is **HIGHLY** unlikely that a Law Enforcement Canine will, even if exposed, contract, develop, and /or transmit Ebola virus. While also very unlikely, it **IS** possible for a LEO K9 to serve as a conduit for transmission via contamination of infected bodily fluid on their haircoat, in their mouth (ie. Post apprehension of an infected person), or on their equipment (collar, vest, lead).

If a LEO K9 has potential exposure to an infected person, the following recommendations should be considered:

-Immediately minimize contact with people (handler included), other animals and the environment . If possible, personal protective equipment should be donned and all bare skin surfaces should be covered prior to human interaction with the LEO K9.

-In order to minimize potential spread of the infected bodily fluids, a LEO canine should be quarantined in-place as soon as safe and possible, in a covered kennel or even a Police K9 vehicle. If the canine is placed in a vehicle, it is now important to know that the interior surface of the vehicle may be considered contaminated and may require decontamination as determined by public health officials.

-Immediate decontamination or transportation of the animal is **NOT** recommended as it may lead to further distribution of the virus.

-As soon as safe, the handler should contact the appropriate veterinary and human health officials for guidance on how to best proceed. Given the specific set of circumstances present, they will decide on the appropriate decontamination, monitoring, and testing protocols to be employed. **Given the human health implications, it is better to be overly cautious.**

- It is important to note that currently there are no “euthanize on site” recommendations from CDC, AVMA or any other health agency within the United States regarding animals with confirmed or suspected exposure to the Ebola virus.