

Late-breaking session

Ebola and WaSH Tuesday, October 14 6:30pm Sunflower Room

The Ebola Virus epidemic that has struck several countries in West Africa has raised many questions and concerns about the transmission and spread of the virus. In particular, around the presence and survival of the virus in and on various materials and media, especially human wastes from sick people. Uncertainty surrounds the extent to which the virus poses human health risks from various common environmental transmission routes, such as Ebola virus-contaminated human excreta and sewage that may get into the environment and potentially contaminate drinking water, bathing and recreational water and irrigation water for food, as well as be carried possibly by vectors such as flies. In addition, the threat of airborne contamination as a route of exposure for infection has also been suggested.

There is still much to learn about such Ebola risks associated with water, sanitation and hygiene as the virus has not been extensively studied in this context. Nevertheless, much is known about the Ebola virus and other viruses that provide the basis for addressing these many WaSH-related questions concerning these potential environmental transmission routes and their human exposure risks.

The goal of this workshop is to communicate what is known or suspected as well as what we still need to know about Ebola virus risks in relation to WaSH. We intend to cover:

1. Introduction to Ebola virus and its disease in humans: background virology, clinical features, basic epidemiology and infection prevention and control measures.
2. Survival of Ebola virus and other viruses in human wastes and in environmental media: what do and do not know.
3. Water, sanitation and hygiene measures to control the spread of Ebola virus from patients through environmental media to other people: what we do and do not know.
4. Response of the international health community and in particular the WaSH community to the Ebola outbreak: policies, guidance and practices to contain the virus and prevent its spread through WaSH pathways.

We seek input from the WaSH community and other stakeholders on how to communicate what is known or suspected about these risks to the many people and communities who want and need to have such information. The output of this session is intended to be information that puts the risks from Ebola virus via WaSH-related pathways into perspective in order to focus efforts on where they are most needed to minimize any Ebola virus health risks from these WaSH-related environmental sources.