

Zwei Personen lesen abwechselnd: blau und schwarz

Difäm health community podcast:

Ebola and Covid-19

Welcome to this Difäm health community podcast, which is about the differences between the Ebola virus disease and Covid-19 today. When we see photos in the newspapers or reports on TV, it looks as if both diseases were quite similar. At least the health workers attending patients with Ebola or Covid-19 are often dressed in similar personal protective equipment.

Here with me is my colleague, Carina Dinkel, we are both members of the Difäm health team.

So, Carina, Ebola virus disease and Covid-19, what comes to your mind when you hear the names of those two diseases?

Well, when you look the first TV reports that showed the Covid-19 situations in China and later on in Italy in 2020, what the people looked like in the PPE and everything they reminded me of the big Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014. And there are some other similarities between the two diseases.

Both diseases are caused by a virus and they are both so-called zoonotic diseases meaning that the virus normally has an animal as its host and then sometimes jumps from the animal to the human being. From then on, the virus can be spread from people to people. Unfortunately, for both diseases we do not have an efficient therapy yet which makes them both quite dangerous.

Okay, Ebola and Covid-19 are both virus diseases but what is the difference between them?

Well, they differ very much in their transmission path. I told you that they can be transmitted from one person to another but a person infected with the Ebola virus transmits the virus via body fluids. The symptoms often include diarrhoea, vomiting and bleeding. All these body fluids are highly infectious. The transmission itself occurs via a smear infection. This means if you touch vomit, blood, any kind of body fluids, even some clothes, or other objects that are stained with body fluids you can be infected. Therefore, extremely strict hand hygiene and disinfection of contaminated surfaces and objects are very important. In the health care setting, this implies that the health workers have to totally cover themselves, from top to toe. This is the only way they can protect themselves.

Okay. On the other hand, a virus in the air is harder to control than a virus on a surface or in clearly visible body fluids, isn't it.

You are perfectly right. Fortunately, Covid-19 is not as deadly as Ebola. Ebola kills up to 60% of the people who catch it. The case fatality rate of Covid-19 is currently estimated at 2%.

That sounds as if Covid-19 was not such a big killer.

Yes and no. The good news about Covid-19 is its low lethality. The bad news is that it infects so many more people because it spreads through the air and this is a fast and easy way. As we have millions of people infected with Covid-19, 2% of these millions is still an awful lot of people. There is yet another aspect that makes Covid-19 so easy to transmit. Infected people are infectious even when they have not yet developed symptoms. In contrast, patients infected with Ebola can only pass on the virus after symptoms have started.

Okay. During the earlier and the current Ebola epidemics, the handling of the deceased persons was a big issue. Is it the same regarding Covid-19?

Actually, that is another big difference between these two diseases. A person who died from Ebola is highly infectious even several days after the death. The corpses have to be buried by professional teams under very strict burial procedures. Family members should refrain from preparing the loved one for the burial even if this is really, really hard.

A person who died from Covid-19 is far less infectious because he or she does not breathe anymore and this is the main way of spreading the virus. There may be some virus left in the lung cavity that can be released when the body is moved or washed. But wearing a mask and gloves can prevent infection.

So, in a nutshell: Ebola and Covid are both virus diseases. Ebola is much more deadly than Covid, but Covid infects more people. Therefore, there are so many more deaths due to Covid-19 than to Ebola. Ebola is transmitted by smear infection and Covid through the air. Protective equipment is important when dealing with patients suspected of one of the two diseases. But with Ebola, we have to be even more careful and strict in terms of protecting ourselves.

Thanks, Carina, for this interesting comparison.

You are welcome, but don't forget the general precautions for both diseases. Wash your hands frequently, wear a mask in crowds and use your PPE according to the risk of infection.

Thank you very much to all of you, be blessed and stay safe!

Sources: