

All.Net Analyst Report and Newsletter

Welcome to our Analyst Report and Newsletter

A touch of the Ebola

I rarely write about things unrelated to information protection in these venues. But today, I have decided to bring up the issue of Ebola – the deadly virus that kills between 60% and 90% of those who get it (the currently spreading strain is in the 90% range), takes from 2 to 21 days between infection and demonstrable symptoms, and then produces bleeding and fluid loss out of all manner of places within and outside of the body, infecting anyone who comes in contact with those fluids.

How dangerous is this?

The influenza outbreak of 1918-19 – just under 100 years ago – killed about 50 million people, or something like 3 percent of the population at the time. Now we face, on a global basis, the potential, hopefully not realized in practice, of a pandemic that could kill between 5 and 6 billion people. That's 9 out of every 10 people living today.

Now in truth, we don't know that much about what will happen if this gets loose in a big way. I have heard speculation that, since it takes 2 to 21 days to show symptoms and kills so quickly, somehow that makes it less likely to become a pandemic. But on the other hand, it means that the people on flights with the passenger who was throwing up and rushing to the bathroom and who ended up dying of Ebola earlier this week, and assuming they aren't all found in time and quarantined, will be swapping sweat with a lot of other people as they fly from place to place, visit family and friends, go to a local bar, the theater, the mall, and wherever else. They may give blood, get in an automobile accident, make love to a new acquaintance, sleep in a hotel bed, leave fluids on the seat in a public restroom, you name it.

We don't know

We don't know everything there is to know about Ebola. Maybe effective treatments exist, maybe we will find ways to immunize, maybe it will burn itself out, maybe public health officials will find ways to keep most of us safe, maybe it doesn't have the same effects on major parts of the population it hasn't yet encountered, maybe with better health care and support far fewer people will die. Maybe... and maybe not.

I have been emailing my kids on this new outbreak for several weeks. A little story here and there, as the infection grows in numbers of people infected. If we would have isolated the victims and villages then, we would not have the death toll coming up on 1,000 today. If we decided to quarantine people with such diseases when they started out instead of waiting perhaps too long, it would be worse for them, perhaps, but far better for the rest of us. But it's now likely too late to stop its spread. It is now spreading in large metropolitan areas in Africa and moving elsewhere from there. These areas have little effective medical care, and certainly not enough infrastructure to support a pandemic with a 90% mortality rate. Earlier this week I told my children, who travel worldwide, that I think it is more than 50% likely that we will start to see cases in the US and EU within a month. And I told one of my best friends, who travels a lot, that he should take precautions and seriously consider alternative ways of getting the job done until we are more certain about what happens next. Now I am telling you.

What exactly am I telling you?

This is really serious business. I hope I am wrong. I hope that in a few months people will tell me I over-reacted. I hope so. But I think it is time for individuals and organizations to act in self-defense. What exactly does this mean? What does it not mean? Here are my key points:

- DON'T PANIC!!! Stop, think, act – in that order.
- Do not imagine that this is a disease of others. It is a disease of everybody. Anybody can get it, anybody can transfer it to others, anybody might die of it.
- It is not (yet) airborne as far as I am aware. You can certainly get it by exchange of fluids (kissing, sex, shared needles, etc.). You may be able to get it by touching, inhaling a sneeze, touching a fluid and then transferring the fluid to your mouth or nose, and things like that. Here's what the World Health Organization says:
 - "... with infection resulting from direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected people, and indirect contact with environments contaminated with such fluids. ... Men who have recovered from the disease can still transmit the virus through their semen for up to 7 weeks after recovery from illness.
 - If an outbreak is suspected, the premises should be quarantined immediately. ...
 - In the absence of effective treatment and a human vaccine, raising awareness of the risk factors for Ebola infection and the protective measures individuals can take is the only way to reduce human infection and death. "¹
- "“The Ebola virus is very easily killed; you can kill it with hot water and soap,” he says. “Alcohol rubs get rid of it in a microsecond.”² Which is to say – wash your hands frequently! (It also helps reduce influenza and other similar diseases). Also see³

This means you!

What if?

Suppose the disease starts to spread near where you live. What can you do about it? Not much for others, but here are some things you might try – IF/WHEN THE TIME COMES:

- Keep your distance: Order it over the Internet, delivery to your door without signature.
 - Then you don't need to interact with anyone at all.
- Schedule meetings for remote Web session rather than traveling everywhere.
 - I have started to do this anyway – it saves a lot of time and cost.
 - But sometimes you do need to go there – so assess the risks and decide.
- Shelter in place... more travel, more interaction with others, more chance of getting it.

Summary

Pay attention to this outbreak. It's not time to panic – but it is time to watch closely.

1 <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en/>

2 <http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20140731-can-ebola-spread-on-planes>

3 <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/ebola-virus-what-how-spread-3934466>