



Rift Valley fever

Last update: 2025-06-16

Key facts

- Rift Valley fever (RVF) is a viral vector-borne zoonotic disease that primarily affects animals but can also infect humans. Infection, from the bites of infected mosquitoes (Aedes and Culex mosquitoes), can cause severe disease in both animals and humans. The disease also results in significant economic losses due to death and abortion among RVF-infected livestock.
- The majority of human infections result from contact with the blood or organs of infected animals. Human infections have also resulted from the bites of infected mosquitoes.
- Outbreaks of RVF in animals can be prevented by a sustained programme of animal vaccination.

Transmission: Vector-borne (mosquito) and direct or contact with infected animals

- Contact with the blood or organs of infected animals (mainly cattle, sheep, goats, buffalo and camels) when caring for, slaughtering or butchering animals
- Eating or drinking uncooked meat, milk or other animal products from infected animals
- Mosquito bites

Most vulnerable to contracting the disease

- People who work with, or butcher/handle raw meat (for example, herders, farmers, slaughter-house workers, veterinarians)
- People living near mosquito breeding sites at risk of mosquito bites
- Healthcare staff treating infected patients

Symptoms

- Fever (usually)
- Headache (usually)
- Joint and muscle pain (usually)

- Neck stiffness (sometimes)
- Sensitivity to light (sometimes)
- Loss of appetite and vomiting (sometimes)

Severe Rift Valley fever

- Changes in eyesight (sometimes)
- Permanent loss of eyesight (sometimes)
- Memory loss (sometimes)
- Confusion, hallucinations, delusions (sometimes)
- Dizziness (sometimes)
- Seizures (sometimes)
- Loss of consciousness (sometimes)
- Rash (sometimes)
- Yellowing of the skin and eyes/jaundice (sometimes)
- Bleeding (sometimes)
- Bloody stool (sometimes)
- Vomiting blood (sometimes)

What can you do to prevent and control an epidemic?

Vector and reservoir control and prevention

- Initiate elimination of mosquitos and breeding sites
- Prevent mosquito bites by advocating the use of:
 - Insecticide-treated curtains or screens on windows and doors
 - Personal protection (application of repellents, wearing long sleeved clothes)
 - Insecticide-treated bed nets

Monitoring the community and identifying sick people and animals

- Detect sick people
- Monitor the community for clusters of sick or dead animals
 - Report any clusters to your supervisor, animal health and welfare authorities and/or health authorities
 - Encourage quarantining sick animals from healthy ones

- Discourage community members from taking sick animals to markets or other places where they may encounter other animals or humans
- Encourage minimal contact between sick animals and humans

Treatment and management

- Rapidly detect and refer suspected cases (in humans and animals) to health facilities
- Provide psychosocial support to the sick person, their families and communities

Sanitation and waste management

- Dispose of contaminated waste safely (animal carcasses)
- Promote safe burial/disposal of bodies and hospital waste (for example, human tissues)
- Control animal movement (if possible)

Personal protection and hygiene

- Promote handwashing with soap
 - BEFORE: preparing food; eating; feeding a child; treating wounds; or caring for sick people
 - AFTER: using the toilet or cleaning a baby; touching garbage or waste; touching or feeding animals; blowing nose, coughing or sneezing; treating wounds; or caring for sick people
- Advise people how to manage sick animals safely (for example, practise hand hygiene, and wear gloves and appropriate personal protective equipment)
- Promote protection from mosquito bites (use a bed net, wear long sleeves and trousers, apply repellents, etc.)

Food hygiene and safety

- Promote cooking meat and other animal products (blood and milk, organs) thoroughly
- Advise people how to slaughter animals safely

Social mobilization and health promotion

- Find out the specific advice being given by health and other relevant authorities
 - Promote safe and dignified burials
 - Promote the safe disposal (burning or burying) of contaminated materials
- Model following this advice and inform community members of current health practice advice
- Offer support and encouragement to follow the advice

- Try to gain understanding about if and why health practice advice is not being followed
- With the guidance of your supervisor and health authorities, work with communities to overcome barriers to following health advice and recommended practices

Immunization

- Rift Valley fever disease is preventable with vaccinations. Support animal vaccination campaigns where available

Mapping and community assessment

- Make a map of the community.
- Mark the following information on the map:
 - How many people have fallen sick with Rift Valley fever? Where?
 - How many people have died? Where? When?
 - Who and where are the vulnerable people?
 - Where are the local health facilities and services? (include traditional healers)
 - Are there areas (such as markets) with animals infected or died with Rift Valley fever?
 - Where are they?
- Record the following information on the back of the map:
 - When did people start to fall sick with Rift Valley fever?
 - How many people live in the affected community?
 - How many are children under five years?
 - Who is most affected by Rift Valley fever?
 - Do people cook milk and meat thoroughly before eating them?
 - Are there handwashing facilities in the community, at animal markets and other areas where livestock gather? (put communal handwashing stations on map)
 - Are soap and water always available?
 - Have the authorities established a vector control programme?
 - What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about use of repellents, sprays, etc.
 - How many houses have insect screens on the windows and doors?
 - How common is it for people to sleep under insecticide-treated bed nets?
 - How many children and how many elderly sleep under a bed net during the day?
 - Are nets hung up and maintained properly?
 - If people are not using nets, why not?
 - What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about handling and slaughtering animals, especially animals that are sick or dead?
 - How does the community dispose of rubbish and solid waste? What are the community's habits, practices and beliefs about caring for sick people? Consider any differences in roles and responsibilities between men and women.

- Is a social mobilization or health promotion programme in place?
- Which sources do people use/trust the most for information?
 - Are there rumours or misinformation about Rift Valley fever? What are the rumours?
- What role do women play in livestock management (including caring for animals, gathering animal feed, and selling animal products in markets)?

Other resources

- [Centre for Disease Control; About Rift Valley Fever. \(2024\)](#)
- [World Health Organisation; Rift Valley fever. \(2018\)](#)
- [World Organisation of Animal Health; Rift Valley Fever \(2019\)](#)