

# Providing protective gear for aid workers in Ebola crisis



By Leslie Morgan, OBE DL  
CEO, Durbin PLC  
Leslie Morgan is a Fellow of the Royal  
Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

Regular readers of this column will know that Durbin has many business divisions, one of which has a long history of co-ordinating relief shipments in emergency situations.

We have all seen on television the devastating effects of the Ebola crisis. Ebola is one of the deadliest diseases known to humans and is transmitted through direct contact with the blood, body fluids, or tissues of infected people. The current outbreak has already killed over 2400 people, including several aid workers and medical staff who have gone to the affected countries of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia to help the local people.

The international community has joined forces to try and contain the spread of the virus and many humanitarian agencies have sent emergency medical aid. Durbin has also been extremely busy providing many of the vital supplies the aid workers require, including coveralls, goggles, boots, gloves, special protective gowns, aprons, antibacterial wipes and even baby milk.

While the aid agencies carry out their

work in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia, the World Health Organisation is working with neighbouring governments on preventative and precautionary measures to keep the disease from spreading further. An emergency committee convened by the director general of the WHO said all countries should provide travellers with information on the health risks, the measures to minimise them, and advice on managing potential exposure to the disease.

In the Middle East, the Gulf Cooperation Council has met to discuss the implications of the virus and to draw out a unified strategy to combat it. As a result, Saudi Arabia has advised its citizens and residents not to travel to the affected countries until further notice. Stringent measures have also been implemented at airports in an attempt to prevent Ebola virus patients entering the region. Additionally, some airlines have cancelled flights to the affected regions, including Emirates who suspended flights to Guinea.

Screening was particularly rigorous in Saudi Arabia where millions of Muslims travelled to perform the Umrah and Haj pilgrimage. The Saudi health ministry took steps to train personnel at all ports of entry to help them identify and deal with Ebola cases and over 7000 pilgrimage visas from the infected West African countries were cancelled. Pilgrims from neighbouring countries were also closely monitored to prevent any potential spread of the virus.

There is currently no licensed treatment for the Ebola virus although several experimental treatments are being developed and some have shown promising results. The WHO's panel of medical ethicists has said that these drugs should be fast-tracked into clinical trials and made available for compassionate use.

But what can be done in the meantime?

Well until a treatment becomes available to the mass market, prevention is the best way to deal with Ebola in the interim. And, as it is not an airborne virus like flu, medical experts say that avoiding it should therefore be quite straightforward: 1) wash hands often with soap and clean water 2) avoid touching anyone suspected of having Ebola 3) do not touch a dead body where someone has died from Ebola, even as part of a burial ceremony 4) avoid eating bushmeat such as bats and monkeys as scientists believe this is how the virus was first transmitted to humans 5) don't panic – there have been cases of people being abandoned when they are suspected of having Ebola when in fact they are suffering from something else.

Hopefully with the pharma community concentrating their efforts, a treatment for Ebola will be available soon. Until that time comes however I'm proud that Durbin is able to play its part in helping to keep aid and medical staff on the ground safe by providing the protective clothing that they need to go about their work to prevent the spread of the disease. MCH

**Durbin PLC** is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 180 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes.  
Web address: [www.durbin.co.uk](http://www.durbin.co.uk)  
Email: [L.morgan@durbin.co.uk](mailto:L.morgan@durbin.co.uk)