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## Special article

# Surgical Protocol for Confirmed or Suspected Cases of Ebola and Other Highly Transmissible Diseases<sup>☆</sup>



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## ABSTRACT

Outbreaks of viral haemorrhagic fevers such as Ebola can lead to imported cases in Europe and America. The eventuality of surgery in the setting of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) is low, but the Spanish Association of Surgeons elaborated a surgical protocol for EVD.

**Indication:** Elective surgical procedures are not indicated. Emergency cases can be considered in: persons under investigation, possible cases and early confirmed cases. In some conditions usually treated by surgery a medical treatment can be tested.

**Hospitals and Teams:** All cases must be treated in high technology hospitals. These hospitals must be equipped with adequate means for healthcare provider's protection. All members of the healthcare team should practice thorough simulation prior to caring for a possible Ebola patient.

**Surgical Protocol:** This protocol is based on international guidelines on use of Personal Protective Equipment, protocols of other scientific societies, and specific recommendations for the operating room environment.

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## Protocolo de actuación quirúrgica en casos confirmados o sospechosos de enfermedad por Ébola y otras enfermedades víricas altamente transmisibles

### R E S U M E N

#### Palabras clave:

Enfermedad por virus del Ébola  
Fiebre hemorrágica de Marburg  
Fiebre de Lassa  
Fiebre hemorrágica de Crimea-Congo  
Cirugía  
Protocolo

Las epidemias por virus altamente transmisibles como la enfermedad por virus del Ébola (EVE) pueden generar casos importados a Europa y América. Aunque la probabilidad de actuación quirúrgica en ellas es baja, la Asociación Española de Cirujanos ha elaborado un protocolo de actuación quirúrgica.

**Indicación:** No está indicada la cirugía electiva. Puede necesitarse cirugía urgente en: personas en observación, casos probables y casos confirmados en fase precoz. En algunas condiciones de habitual tratamiento quirúrgico puede instaurarse una terapia médica conservadora con intención de evitar la intervención.

**Hospitales y equipos:** Los casos deben concentrarse en hospitales de alta especialización, únicos centros en los que se practique una eventual intervención quirúrgica. Estos deben garantizar la seguridad de los profesionales. Los equipos quirúrgicos han de recibir extensa formación mediante simulación.

**Protocolo quirúrgico:** Las recomendaciones se basan en protocolos de uso del equipo de protección individual, guías clínicas de otras sociedades y recomendaciones específicas para el área quirúrgica.

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## Introduction

Since its initial description in 1976, there have been several outbreaks of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in western countries of the African continent. In 2014, cases were imported to Europe and North America. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), all countries with international airports are at risk for experiencing imported cases. Therefore, they recommend a high level of medical vigilance, specific preparation of healthcare systems and preparation of detailed protocols for disease treatment.

The Spanish Association of Surgeons (*Asociación Española de Cirujanos*, or AEC) was required in 2014 by the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality to prepare a surgical action protocol for suspicious or confirmed patients with this disease. The AEC considers that the diffusion of this protocol may be of interest to hospitals and healthcare systems in our area of influence. This document expresses the position of the AEC regarding the surgical treatment of EVD, which can be adapted for other highly contagious diseases, such as Marburg virus, Lassa fever, Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever, etc.

There is very limited scientific evidence about aspects associating EVD and surgery. When this protocol was prepared, there were only 2 documents that specifically deal with this subject, both of which are from October 2014. The Surgical Infection Society published a generic declaration<sup>1</sup> and the American College of Surgeons presented a plan of action written by surgeons with surgical experience in developing countries.<sup>2</sup> This latter protocol has been adopted by several African countries. Our manuscript has been developed by the Surgical Infection Group of the AEC, based on the recommendation of both societies as well as the opinion of national and international experts in surgical infection. The protocol assumes that the general diagnostic aspects, transport of

samples, isolation of patients and protection of healthcare personnel have been communicated by the healthcare authorities and detailed in other documents, so this document only refers to surgical aspects.

### Ethical Concerns

The fear of operating on EVD patients is reminiscent of the beginning of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) crisis. In a declaration statement published in 2004, the American College of Surgeons affirmed that, using the highest standards to control against infection, surgeons are ethically obliged to treat patients with HIV infection.<sup>3</sup> In the opinion of the AEC, surgeons are obliged to provide care to each and every potential surgical patient, but the situation of surgical indication in patients with suspected EVD should be led by teams of volunteers who are specifically trained for this situation.

On the other hand, hospitals have the obligation to provide the necessary means in order to apply proper prevention measures for their staff in accordance with current regulations and clinical protocols. In the absence of said means, medical professionals cannot be required to provide treatment when the activity would carry a similar degree of risk as the pathology requiring surgery. Thus, the degree of medical care demanded should be proportional to the means available in cases that carry a high risk of infection or those with doubtful therapeutic benefits. Therefore, the option that would provide the greatest benefit while involving the least possible risk should be chosen.

### Indication of Surgery in Patients With Suspected or Confirmed Ebola Virus Disease

We should differentiate between the indications for *elective* surgery and *urgent* surgery. We concur with the statement by the American College of Surgeons that *no elective surgery*

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