Reviewer’s report

Title: A guidance for contact tracing of plane passengers with the Viral Haemorrhagic Fevers Lassa, Ebola or Marburg Results of an European expert consultation

Version: 2 Date: 17 September 2012

Reviewer: Matthias Borchert

Reviewer’s report:

Minor Essential Revisions

The author can be trusted to make these. For example, missing labels on figures, the wrong use of a term, spelling mistakes.

1. Methods: Instead of “expert panel on the VHF s Lassa, Ebola and Marburg haemorrhagic fevers” write “expert panel on Lassa fever as well as Ebola and Marburg haemorrhagic fever” – the disease caused by Lassa virus is conventionally called Lassa fever, and I guess the panel dealt with haemorrhagic and non-haemorrhagic cases of Lassa fever alike.

2. Results: The statement “However, in a study in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998, no antibodies were found in health care workers despite frequent high risk procedures and without stringent barrier nursing.” lacks the reference.

3. Discussion: “Even though there is no causal treatment”. Replace “thought” by “though”.

4. Cases of Lassa, Ebola or Marburg haemorrhagic fevers are not considered to be infectious before they are symptomatic [53]. Reference #53 does not provide any information on Lassa fever. Since similar errors have been pointed out in the first review, the authors are urged to very carefully double-check their referencing.

Discretionary Revisions

These are recommendations for improvement which the author can choose to ignore. For example clarifications, data that would be useful but not essential.

5. The title is more specific now but the formulation “… the Viral Haemorrhagic Fevers Lassa, Ebola or Marburg” is unconventional and does not read well. Suggest considering “A guidance for contact tracing of plane passengers suffering from Lassa fever, Ebola or Marburg haemorrhagic fever”

6. Background “Also the travel from and to Africa has increased (average annual growth of tourist arrivals in Africa 2000-2005: 5.7% [2]). With this increase also the type of tourism might have changed, reaching more remote areas and thus leading to higher likeliness of risk exposure.” Whether the “type of tourism has changed” is pure speculation – and this speculation is not needed to make the authors’ point. I think that a certain proportion of Africa tourists are of the
cave-exploring adventurous type, and if the overall number of tourists increase, the number of adventurous tourists will increase as well even if the “type of tourism” remains the same. I furthermore think that the term “likeliness of risk exposure” is over-complicated. Suggest considering “Also the travel from and to Africa has increased (average annual increase of tourist arrivals in Africa 2000-2005: 5.7% [2]). With this increase the number of tourists reaching more remote areas and risking exposure to haemorrhagic fever viruses may also increase.”

7. Results: “One event article was retrieved from the grey literature”. I am not sure that a “News” item in the BMJ is appropriately addressed as “grey literature”.

8. Table 1: I wonder whether the possibility that humans are infected with Marburg virus through contact with monkeys should be mentioned. It is true that the two African Marburg outbreaks have not been linked to contact with monkeys (in DRC, gold miners likely received the virus directly from bats; in Angola, the outbreak could to my knowledge not be linked to any primary transmission event), but from the European Marburg outbreak we know that African monkeys can be infected, and that humans can acquire Marburg infection through contact with monkeys. Given that in Africa monkey-human contact is likely more widespread than bat-human contact through bush meat consumption, the risk that Marburg transmission from monkeys to humans occurs in Africa is real.

9. Results: “one seat away from the index case in all directions”. Consider replacing by “one seat away from the index case in all four directions” or “one seat away from the index case in both directions”, depending on whether the seats in front of and behind the index case are meant to be included.

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests