Dr. Ravinder Mamtani said there was little to fear from Ebola unless you are travelling to one of the affected regions.

The facts about the Ebola virus were outlined in the latest edition of Weill Cornell Medical College’s (WCMC-Q) Ask the Expert series.

The interactive public talks are part of the College’s Sahtak Awalan – Your Health First campaign and aim to help the public understand health matters and encourage them to make positive changes to their lives.

The Ebola virus has been causing headlines around the world with the media discussing the possibility of a pandemic. But Dr. Ravinder Mamtani, Associate Dean for Global and Public Health at WCMC-Q, said the general public had nothing to fear from the virus, unless they were travelling to one of the affected regions of West Africa.

Ebola was first discovered in 1976 when there were two outbreaks – one in Sudan and the second in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since then the disease has made sporadic returns but the one that emerged in March of 2014 has been the deadliest, killing more than 7,000 people, mostly in West Africa.

Dr. Mamtani said: “It is true that the Ebola virus is highly infectious but it is not transmitted by casual contact. Also, Ebola cannot be transmitted through air like influenza, you have to physically come into contact with the bodily fluids of someone who is exhibiting symptoms which means it is unlikely to spread among populations distant from affected areas.”

It is thought that fruit bats act as a reservoir for the disease, and they pass the virus onto other wildlife. Researchers believe that the virus is introduced into the human population through close contact with the blood and other bodily fluids of infected animals such as fruit bats, monkeys, chimpanzees and gorillas. Currently there is no cure or vaccination against the disease, but Dr. Mamtani said that research is ongoing and there are two possible candidates for a vaccine. The most important issue now, though, is one of disease control; efficiently isolating patients and then correctly disposing of bedding and clothes once the patient has recovered.

According to the World Health Organization, good outbreak control measures include “applying a package of interventions, namely case management, surveillance, contact tracing, a good laboratory service, safe burials and social mobilization”. Educating public about risk factors of the disease and appropriate preventive measures that individuals can take to reduce virus transmission is vital.