Beast Virus

turns humans into pulp

By Lindsay Griffiths, .

in' LONDON, Friday

It normally feeds on pigs and

monkeys but the Ebola virus

gripping-Zaire is now turning

human flesh to pulp in an epidemic

*mote* gory than AIDS.

Ebola leaves vile bodies in its

wake - blood and body parts ooze

from every orifice - but experts

say its victims turn to mush too

quickly to spark a new global

plague.

As the worm-shaped virus

jumps from beast to man, victims

die a short but very nasty death.

"The only sound is a choking

in his throat as he continues to

vomit while unconscious," Richard

Preston wrote in his best-selling

book *The Hot Zone* on deadly

new viruses.

"Then comes a sounds like a

bedsheet being torn in half,

which is the sound of his bowels

opening at the sphincter and

venting blood. The blood is

mixed with intestinal lining. He

has sloughed off his gut.

The lining of his intestines

have come off and are being expelled

along with huge amounts

of blood." .

While the symptoms surpass

any horror movie, the release: in

Britain of a new Dustin Hoffman

film chronicling a devastating viral

spread has fuelled fears of a new killer to rival Aids.

Medical experts call the Hoffman

thriller "science fiction",

But like today's epidemic in

central Africa, "Outbreak" is

chilling fiction that could become nightmare

fact.

In real life the virus is a Level

Four pathogen - a step up from

the AIDS virus - and there is no

known cure.

It is one of the most lethal viruses

known to man, spread

through close contact with blood

or bodily fluids.

While deaths thus far have

been relatively few and most experts

say it does not compare to

Aids, its spread could yet be

devastating.

Today, experts scrambled to

contain the virus, which kills nine

in 10 victims.

Officials said Ebola had now

fanned out to a third town in the

central African st.ate of Zaire.

"There is no vaccine, no treatment,"

Preston told *Reuters* in

the United' States.

"Outbreaks burn themselves

out quickly and victims don't live

long enough to pass it along."

First comes fever, a sore throat

and a headache.

The early symptoms are followed

by vomiting, abdominal

,pain and diarrhea Within two weeks of infection,

the uncontrolled bleeding begins -

internally and externally - as the

human innards worm their way

out through the eyes,' lips, ears

and even skin.

"At the end the virus affects

your blood clotting mechanism .

To do a biopsy on such a patient

is really a mess," Guido van der

Groen, who investigated the first

outbreak of the Ebola virus in

Zaire in 1976, told *Reuters* in

Belgium.

Indeed, tales of the vile bodies

have. gripped the British press,

famed for spreading scare stories

about a flesh eating bug that hit

Britain and the United States

last year.

But experts note that· Ebola

has absolutely no link with HIV,

which causes Aids, and is unlikely

ever to wreak the same havoc.

Indeed Ebola's saving, grace is

the speed in which it kills - HIV

carriers have years to spread

their virus - and experts from the

world over have rushed to Zaire

to incubate carriers.

"It is a dwarf in terms of danger

when compared to the giant

of Aids," van der Groen said.

"I guarantee you that between

now ll.nd10 years we will not have

Ebola spreading all over the

world and infecting 20 to 30 mil.-

lion people." (Reuters)