

TO: All State Employees

FROM: Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D., Secretary, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

DATE: October 17, 2014

RE: Questions and Answers about the Ebola Virus

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The recent news reports on the Ebola virus naturally raise concerns for everyone. This message provides some basic information about this infection, the recent outbreak in Africa, and steps we have taken to protect Marylanders.

The Ebola Virus is a virus that has caused small outbreaks in Africa for a number of years. It is spread through direct contact with bodily fluids or secretions of someone who is ill. It is not spread by someone who is not sick. It is not spread through the air. After exposure, it can take up to 21 days to develop symptoms. Supportive treatment can help individuals recover. Unfortunately, there is no vaccine or specific treatment, and even with supportive care, Ebola can be fatal.

This year, a large outbreak of Ebola has affected the West African nations of Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone. Many nations, including the United States, are sending people and supplies to fight this outbreak. Our hearts and prayers go out to those who are affected. So far, one person who contracted Ebola from this outbreak has come to the United States. He subsequently died, and, as of today, two of the health care providers who cared for him have contracted the infection. One of these was transported yesterday to the NIH clinical center.

A number of actions protect Marylanders from Ebola:

- First, there are restrictions on travel for individuals in affected nations who are ill.
- Second, there are efforts to screen certain passengers upon arrival in the United States.
- Third, our health care system can identify potential cases, isolate the individuals, and perform testing.
- Fourth, if there is a case in Maryland, hospitals can isolate the ill person and provide supportive care that may be lifesaving. We will provide extra support to hospitals to protect the safety of our health care workers.
- Fifth, our public health system can track down contacts of cases and prevent further spread.

- Sixth, we are monitoring emergency departments and working closely with hospitals and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Because of these steps -- while it is possible that additional cases might appear in the United States, including Maryland -- it is very unlikely that there will be a significant outbreak here. Strict adherence to infection control practices prevents the spread of the virus in healthcare settings. The Health Department will work closely with leaders in infection control and CDC to support health care workers.

Misunderstanding about Ebola can lead to confusion and unnecessary fear. If there are questions about Ebola, please make sure that senior officials in your department are aware and can direct the questions to experts at the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Please also consult the DHMH page on Ebola, <http://dhmh.maryland.gov/ebola>.

The CDC has posted Frequently Asked Questions about Ebola at <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/2014-west-africa/qa.html>. We also strongly encourage people to get vaccinated against the flu. Vaccination locations can be found on the DHMH website at <http://t.co/0d5AVjAqcr>.