

October 17, 2014 - The Hamilton County Health Department is monitoring events related to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the subsequent infection of two healthcare workers infected by the first travel-associated case to be diagnosed in the United States. These cases raise the importance of a coordinated response of the entire health care system.

The Hamilton County Health Department follows federal and state guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) to monitor public health disease threats and to communicate with local healthcare and emergency response partners.

On October 15, 2014 the Hamilton County Health and Medical Coalition held a quarterly meeting and used the opportunity to discuss county-wide health situational awareness during situations like Ebola or MERS. Participants from local hospitals, clinics, emergency medical services, schools and the health department were joined by staff from the Indiana State Department of Health, MESH and the Tippecanoe County Health Department. The Coalition identified the flow and sharing of critical information in order to improve decision making before, during and after an emergency.

The Hamilton County Health Department Preparedness Division continually monitors disease threats both locally and nationally in order to plan for, mitigate, and respond to public health emergencies, review potential actions and ensure local readiness.

CDC Recommendations for Ebola Prevention and Control in the United States:

Health care providers should test ill patients for Ebola if they have recently traveled to an affected area. If you are returning to the United States after traveling to an area where an Ebola outbreak is occurring or have come into direct contact with blood or body fluids of a person who is sick with Ebola :

- Monitor your health closely for 21 days.
- Seek medical care immediately if you develop a fever and any of the following symptoms: headache, muscle pain, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain or unexplained bruising or bleeding.
- Tell your doctor about your recent travel and symptoms before you visit the office or emergency room. This will help them prepare for your arrival and protect other patients.

How is Ebola Spread?

According to the CDC, Ebola can only be spread to others after symptoms begin. There is no risk if someone does not have symptoms. Symptoms may appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure to Ebola, but the average is 8 to 10 days. Symptoms include:

- fever (greater than 38.0°C or 100.4°F)
- severe headache
- muscle pain
- weakness
- diarrhea

- vomiting
- abdominal (stomach) pain
- unexplained hemorrhage (bleeding or bruising)

Ebola is spread through direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with:

- blood or body fluids (including but not limited to urine, saliva, sweat, feces, vomit, breast milk, and semen) of a person who is sick with Ebola
- objects (like needles and syringes) that have been contaminated with the virus
- infected animals

Ebola is not spread through the air or by water, or in general, food. (In Africa, however, Ebola may be spread as a result of handling bushmeat, wild animals hunted for food, and contact with infected bats.)

Is there a Danger of Ebola Spreading in the United States?

According to the CDC, Ebola is not spread through casual contact; therefore, the risk of an outbreak in the United States is very low. We know how to stop Ebola's further spread: thorough case finding, isolation of ill people, contacting people exposed to the ill person, and further isolation of contacts if they develop symptoms. The United States public health and medical systems have had prior experience with sporadic cases of diseases such as Ebola. In the past decade, the United States had 5 imported cases of Viral Hemorrhagic Fever (VHF) diseases similar to Ebola (1 Marburg, 4 Lassa). None resulted in any transmission in the United States.

CDC recognizes that even a single case of Ebola diagnosed in the United States raises concerns. Knowing the possibility exists, medical and public health professionals across the country have been preparing to respond. CDC and public health officials are taking precautions to identify people who have had close personal contact with the ill people and health care professionals have been reminded to use meticulous infection control at all times.

Individual/Family Emergency Preparedness

Ebola in the news provides us with a reminder that we should all prepare ahead of time for any public health emergency, whether it is infectious, the result of bioterrorism, or weather-related. For more information on how to be better prepared please go to www.hamiltoncounty.in.gov and click on Public Health and then Public Health Preparedness to learn more.

Additional Information and Links

The following links have helpful information that is being continually updated:

www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html

www.in.gov/isdh/26447.htm