

What Utah Public Health is Doing to Prepare for Ebola

Long before the first confirmed case of Ebola in the United States was diagnosed in Dallas, Texas, Utah's state and local public health departments and hospitals were preparing for the possibility that the disease could turn up in our state.

While the chances of a large-scale outbreak of Ebola occurring in the United States are very low, the recent patients in Dallas and New York are a reminder that isolated cases are a very real possibility, and being prepared is key to preventing disease and infection control.

Creating Response Plans

- Governor Gary Herbert directed the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) to lead the state's preparedness efforts and to work closely with local health departments, hospitals, clinics, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies to ensure that appropriate infection control procedures, transport procedures and public health actions are in place.
- The UDOH will adhere to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance and recommendations regarding exposure and personal protective equipment (PPE) used by health care workers, EMS workers, laboratorians and environmental/waste management services.
- Hospitals are continuing to update Ebola plans, including capabilities to screen for exposure, to isolate and/or transport people who may have been exposed, to arrange for testing, and to treat sick patients in isolation.
 - These plans are being developed jointly, following CDC guidance, and with input from the UDOH, local health departments, hospital infection control experts, Emergency Preparedness and many other partners.
- The UDOH is working closely with the CDC and the Utah Public Health Laboratory (UPHL) to submit testing for persons with potential Ebola virus exposure.
 - The UPHL provides assistance with training and shipping of samples to the CDC for confirmatory testing.
- The UDOH has developed an [Ebola Disease Plan](#) to assist healthcare providers with identifying and treating patients, controlling the spread of disease, and notifying public health.
- Public health is also collaborating with Indian Health Services, the Utah Indian Health Advisory Board, military, airport authorities and mortuaries to ensure appropriate Ebola preparedness strategies are in place and relevant guidance has been received.

Watching the Situation

- Public health's level of awareness is high. We know what to look for, we know what questions to ask, and we know how to respond.
- The focus of Ebola preparedness efforts is providing support to public health and health care entities in the state to 1) identify, 2) isolate and, 3) notify public health of Ebola patients.
 - Early notification of public health is essential to ensure optimal coordination of diagnostic, transportation, hospitalization, and contact tracing services.
- UDOH leadership has set up an Incident Command Structure (ICS) for *preparedness* for Ebola (Note: we are not in a response stage).
 - This structure will help streamline internal and external communication and coordinate technical assistance and disease control activities with partners.

Monitoring Travelers

- One of the most critical components of stopping any disease outbreak is finding people who may have been exposed and monitoring them, if necessary.
 - This is called "contact tracing" and in Utah, our public health system is very good at it.
- In Utah, state and local public health workers are participating in the nationwide program to conduct "active monitoring" of all travelers returning from Ebola-affected countries.
 - This means public health will contact the traveler daily for 21 days from the date of departure from an Ebola-affected country to inquire about fever and other symptoms the person may develop.
- Active monitoring will allow for early detection of symptoms, and limit the number of contacts after symptoms develop. Ebola is not transmitted by persons who have no symptoms.
 - It will also allow public health to coordinate with local EMS providers and hospitals to prepare ahead of time for the possibility of transporting or receiving a sick patient.

Managing Information

- The UDOH is coordinating with local health departments, hospital and public health communicators, distributing current state and national information, informing the public of Ebola risks, prevention strategies, and preparedness efforts.
- Public health communicators also work to dispel rumors and myths that may lead to fear and decisions that are not based on science and experience.
- The situation is changing, and as the situation warrants, Utah public health will adopt and adapt our preparedness plans.

For more information about Ebola virus disease, contact the Bureau of Epidemiology at 801-538-6191.