



CARPHA RESPONSE TO THE EBOLA EPIDEMIC IN WEST AFRICA

15 December 2014

The Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), together with CARPHA Member States (CMS), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/World Health Organization (WHO) and other regional and international partners, is taking active steps to prepare the region in response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. To date, no cases of Ebola virus disease (EVD) have been reported in the Caribbean region. However, in the region of the Americas, US authorities have reported four cases, including one death, from EVD.

CARPHA advocates for regional preparedness using a partnership approach that provides a coordinated, measured and proportionate response, and recognises that the region should help to combat Ebola at source in the countries affected.

CARPHA has a mandate to respond to regional health emergencies, and with its partners, has undertaken activities to support Ebola response and preparedness. These include:

Leadership and Coordination

- In September 2014, CARPHA provided advice and recommendations to the CARICOM Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD), where Health Ministers deliberated on the Ebola threat to the region.
- In October 2014, the Executive Director of CARPHA met with The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Health Ministers to provide them with the evidence-based information required to support their response efforts.
- CARPHA collaborated with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the OECS Commission, on the CARICOM Heads of Government special session in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, in November 2014 where the Heads of Government recognised the public health challenge facing the Community, and adopted a 10-point plan to 'Stop Ebola There and Here' (SETH) (http://www.caricom.org/jsp/pressreleases/press_releases_2014/pres243_14.jsp?null&prnf=1)

- Convened and chaired the first meeting of the Regional Coordinating Mechanism on Ebola (RCME), as mandated by the CARICOM Heads of Government.
- Developing an Ebola response strategy that is predicated upon the ten-point plan agreed to by CARICOM Heads of Government in November 2014.

Preparedness

- Activated its Incident Management Team (IMT) in August 2014 to support coordination of technical assistance and disease control activities with and partners. In September 2014, CARPHA surveyed CMS Ebola preparedness, focusing on ports of entry, contact tracing, healthcare facilities, and core International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) capacities.
- Joint CARPHA-Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/World Health Organization (WHO) missions were undertaken to nine Caribbean countries to assess their Ebola preparedness.
- As a member of the WHO Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), CARPHA personnel are preparing to deploy to West Africa to assist with response efforts including: surveillance, contact tracing, data management, laboratory services, and other areas. This will help support preparation for a possible Ebola case in the Caribbean.
- CARPHA is collaborating with PAHO/WHO to establish Regional Rapid Response Teams for rapid deployment in the event of a case of Ebola in a CMS.
- CARPHA is working with the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) and other partners at ports of entry (primarily international airports) to strengthen routine processes to identify travellers who may pose an infectious disease risk.

Epidemiology and Laboratory

- Assessment of the risk from the current outbreak of EVD for the resident Caribbean population are conducted, and the results posted on the CARPHA Ebola webpage.
- CARPHA continues to monitor the evolving situation regarding EVD and other viral haemorrhagic fevers.
- CARPHA, in conjunction with PAHO/WHO, has facilitated access to laboratory facilities at the WHO-Collaborating Centres at CDC and Public Health Agency Canada for diagnosis of EVD cases.
- Conducted regional training for laboratory staff responsible for the packaging and shipping of dangerous infectious substances, such as EVD, to ensure they are certified in the Transport of Infectious Substances. The certification is recognized by the International Air Transportation Association (IATA), and follows WHO guidelines.
- The Biosafety Level 3 (BSL3) laboratory at CARPHA is being prepared to receive and test clinical samples from suspect EVD patients, using molecular diagnostic methods. Ebola viral culture will NOT be conducted; this can only be done safely in a BSL4 laboratory facility.
- Biosafety experts, from CARPHA, PAHO and other organizations, are working together to provide guidelines for clinical laboratories to adequately manage samples from suspected EVD patients.

- Arrangements are being made for CARPHA staff to be trained in the use of tools and techniques for the diagnosis of EVD in a BSL3 facility.

Case Management and Infection, Prevention and Control

- Links to a number of specific professional guidelines on case management and infection control have been identified, collated and made available on the dedicated CARPHA Ebola webpage.

Communication

- Initial notification and risk assessment provided on the CARPHA website.
- Direct contact with Chief Medical Officers, National Epidemiologists and Laboratory Directors through virtual meetings to provide updates, advice and guidance to health authorities of CMS have been chaired and coordinated by CARPHA.
- As part of the response effort, several Interim guidance documents, have been developed to provide information to the general public, visitors to the Caribbean, healthcare professionals and others. These are available on the CARPHA Ebola webpage.
- Together with the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), CARPHA has produced EVD information and messages for travellers. Hotels have also been provided with information on how to identify and respond to potential cases of EVD.

Public Information and Community Outreach

- CARPHA has advised that persons resident in the Caribbean avoid all non-essential travel to the West African nations of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.
- CARPHA has a dedicated EVD webpage (<http://carpha.org/What-We-Do/Public-Health-Activities/Ebola>) where it regularly posts information, guidance and relevant documents.
- TV and radio interviews, media releases and media conferences have been used to communicate key messages and news to the general public.
- A frequently asked questions (FAQs) document has been developed and posted on the CARPHA Ebola webpage to help dispel myths and enhance understanding of Ebola.
- Opportunities have been taken to provide education regarding Ebola virus disease for key stakeholder groups and partner agencies through direct contact, trainings, lectures, the internet, social media and the mass media.

Resource Mobilisation

- In collaboration with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and other partners, CARPHA is establishing the Stop Ebola There and Here (SETH) Fund. The SETH Fund will provide support to CMS, CARPHA and other regional organizations in their response to this emergency, both in West Africa and in the Caribbean.
- CARPHA and PAHO/WHO are collaborating on a proposal to be submitted to IDB for the provision of financial resources for response and preparedness. CARPHA is also actively working with a number of other partners, including the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), to mobilise resources that will assist the Ebola response, build IHR core capacities and strengthen regional health security.
- The Government of Brazil, a partner country, is working together with CARPHA to mobilise resources to strengthen the regional Ebola response, and support building IHR capacities.
- Proactive sourcing of funds that are Ebola-specific as well as incorporating considerations in projects and programmes that are funded through development and other partners. These resource mobilisation activities will support SETH activities, the development of long-term health system resilience and strengthen regional health security infrastructure.