



CARPHA STATEMENT ON EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE

October 30, 2014

The Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) is responsible for preventing disease, promoting and protecting health. Key functions of the Agency include providing leadership and coordination of regional public health responses to public health emergencies in the Caribbean. In light of the World Health Organization's declaration of the West-African Outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and bearing in mind the reality of rapid international travel, CARPHA seeks to keep the Caribbean population abreast of the Ebola public health issue and of the mechanisms being put in place to address this issue.

At this time, CARPHA assesses that the likelihood of an Ebola case being imported to the Caribbean region is low. To date, there have been NO reported cases of EVD in the Caribbean region. The level of risk may change as new information becomes available. However, the consequence of an imported case could be very serious for both population health and the tourism industry in the Caribbean, so national and regional preparedness and response capacity needs to be strengthened.

CARPHA is working closely with its regional and international partners, such as the Pan American Health Organisation/World Health Organisation (PAHO/WHO), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO), the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), governments and health officials to strengthen capacity, including providing training, guidelines, updated information and technical support to Member States. CARPHA will continue to monitor the situation and advises Member States to continue their efforts to attain an appropriate level of preparedness for the possible introduction of a case of EVD to the Caribbean.

CARPHA's Activities to Bolster Regional Preparedness and Response include:

- Establishing an Incident Management Team for coordination of regional response and supporting national preparedness and response.
- Monitoring and providing updates on the assessed risk of Ebola for the Caribbean
- Accessing laboratory diagnostic services of certified laboratories in Canada and USA, while we work to establish the capacity for testing for Ebola at CARPHA.

- Assessing Ebola preparedness of Member States through surveys and joint missions with PAHO/WHO.
- Providing training, including two regional workshops on the shipping and handling of infectious substances, and biosafety practices for clinical laboratories from November 17-21, 2014 at CARPHA, Trinidad campus.
- Establishing a Rapid Response Team, including epidemiology, laboratory and biosafety expertise, in the event of a case of Ebola in a Member State.
- Gaining political support for a coordinated regional response. CARPHA is currently working with CARICOM Secretariat to hold a meeting in November 2014 of CARICOM Heads of Government, with the theme of "**Stopping Ebola There and Here**"
- Sharing Information. CARPHA continues to update information on its website for travellers, health professionals, the public, the media and other stakeholders.
- Coordinating future deployment of technical teams from the Caribbean in collaboration with PAHO/WHO to assist in EVD-affected countries and improve regional knowledge and experience with viral hemorrhagic fevers and outbreak response.
- Mobilizing partners and resources to address this public health priority issue in the region.

Facts about Ebola

- Ebola is **NOT** spread through the air or by water, mosquitoes or consumption of properly cooked food. **Only persons infected with Ebola virus and who have symptoms of illness can transmit the disease.**
- EVD can only be transmitted through:
 - Direct contact with blood or body fluids (e.g., urine, saliva, sweat, feces, vomit, breast milk, and semen) of a person who is sick with Ebola.
 - Objects (e.g., needles and syringes) that have been contaminated with the virus.
 - Infected animals (e.g., bats, primates) in the affected countries
- Symptoms of EVD can appear 2 to 21 days after exposure, but the average is 8-10 days
- Symptoms usually begin suddenly with fever, sore throat, chills, headache and muscle pain and weakness. Following the initial symptoms, additional symptoms may include rash, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and internal and external bleeding
- There are no licensed Ebola-specific therapies available at this time. The treatment of EVD is largely supportive and focuses on replacement of fluids lost through bleeding, vomiting and diarrhoea, provision of adequate nutrition and the alleviation of discomfort.
- There is currently no vaccine available to prevent the transmission of EVD. For the time being, prevention consists of avoiding all contact with potentially infectious bodily fluids, objects or surfaces. The virus is easily inactivated by common disinfectants such as bleach.

CARPHA recommends that Member States focus their efforts on:

- Identifying and addressing gaps in preparedness for Ebola virus disease.
- Strengthening their International Health Regulations (IHR) core capacities and health systems, particularly contact tracing, and infection prevention and control at ports of entry, isolation and healthcare facilities.
- Providing relevant information and communication materials to the public
- Reviewing Infection Prevention and Control guidelines for Ebola by health care personnel
- Acquiring appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Identifying and providing funding to fill gaps, and determining areas of mutual support.

CARPHA's Advice to Travellers to the Caribbean:

Detailed guidelines for travellers are available on CARPHA's website
http://carpha.org/Portals/0/docs/EBOLA/Traveller_Guide_Oct28.pdf

Travellers to the Caribbean do not need to take any special precautions at this time, since there have been no cases of EVD in the Caribbean region.

Travellers arriving or returning to the Caribbean from an Ebola-affected country in West Africa will undergo exit screening on departure, and may face travel restrictions and special screening measures in some Caribbean countries. Travellers are advised to:

- Seek information on any travel restrictions or special screening measures for the countries they will be visiting, BEFORE travelling. These may include travel bans, non-issuance of visas and/or quarantine measures.
- Monitor your temperature.
- NOT travel if you have a fever, or other symptoms of EVD.
- Contact health authorities and seek medical attention immediately if you develop a fever and mention your travel history.

At this time, CARPHA advises against any non-essential travel to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

CARPHA will keep the Caribbean public and other key stakeholders apprised of developments for this public health issue through our website (<http://carpha.org/What-We-Do/Public-Health-Activities/Ebola>), media releases and other fora.