



CARPHA RESPONSE TO THE EBOLA EPIDEMIC IN WEST AFRICA

August 22nd, 2019

On July 17, 2019 the WHO declared the current Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). Currently, although the risk remains high for the DRC and surrounding countries, at the global level, the risk remains low. To date, no cases of Ebola virus disease (EVD) have been reported in the Caribbean region or countries outside of Central Africa.

Although the risk level for the Caribbean sub-region is currently low, the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) advocates for regional preparedness using a partnership approach that provides a coordinated, measured and proportionate response, and recognises that the region should assist where feasible 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

- Current secretariat for the Regional Coordinating Mechanism on Health Security (RCMHS) inclusive of Ebola response, as mandated by the CARICOM Heads of Government.
- Developed a Regional 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 2019 to support coordination of technical assistance and promote preparedness activities with CARPHA Member States (CMS) and partners.
- Currently surveying CMS Ebola preparedness, focusing on ports of entry, contact tracing, healthcare facilities, specimen shipment and other related core International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) capacities.
- As a member of the WHO Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), CARPHA personnel may be called on to deploy to provide assistance with the Central African Ebola

outbreak

- CARPHA collaborates with the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) and other partners at ports of entry (primarily international airports) to strengthen routine processes which identify travellers who may pose an infectious disease risk.

Epidemiology and Laboratory

- CARPHA continues to monitor the evolving situation regarding EVD and other viral haemorrhagic fevers in Central Africa.
- CARPHA provides epidemiological updates to Member States on current status and risk assessments associated with the Central African outbreak.
- CARPHA partners with international agencies such as CDC and Public Health Agency Canada (WHO collaborating Centres) for diagnosis of EVD cases.
- The Agency conducts 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 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.
- CARPHA, PAHO and other organizations provide guidelines for clinical laboratories to adequately manage samples from suspected EVD patients.

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 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 provides EVD information and messages for travellers, cruise ships and hotels.

Public Information and Community Outreach

- 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 are also 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 are 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 established the Stop Ebola There and Here (SETH) Fund and is seeking donor support. The aim of the SETH Fund is to provide emergency response support to CMS, CARPHA and other regional organizations should need arise.
- 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.
- CARPHA is currently the recipient of an IDB grant, which focuses on building IHR core capacities and strengthening regional health security.

