

## What if Ebola Made it to Boston? Health Officials Launch Awareness Campaign



In this undated handout photo provided by Medecins Sans Frontieres, local staff and healthcare workers for Doctors Without Borders, wear Ebola protection equipment in Liberia. For doctors and nurses fighting Ebola in West Africa, working in head-to-toe protective gear in muddy health clinics is often the least of their problems, as many also struggle to convince people they are there to stop Ebola, not spread it. (AP Photo/MSF)

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On Wednesday morning, the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) hosted a media briefing with various leaders of the city's public health branches to outline the plans for the "very low" likelihood that the deadly Ebola virus disease (EVD), which international health organizations estimate has infected more than 1,000 people, would make it to Massachusetts.

"While the risk to our residents is very low, it is always better to prepare so that we can appropriately identify and care for suspect cases and work with the community to prevent further illness," said Dr. Barbara Ferrer, executive director of the Boston Public Health Commission

(BPHC). “We want a well-coordinated plan in place in the event a case of EVD is found in the city.”

Since March 2014, more than 1,000 people have been infected with Ebola in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, while one case has been reported as a result of air travel in Nigeria. With the international call for health care workers to travel to Africa to help treat the victims and help contain the spread of this deadly virus, the Boston public health officials are simply preparing for the risk of exposure that medical outreach and travel carries with it. The virus is spread when an individual is exposed to the bodily fluids of a person infected with Ebola.

An American, Dr. Kent Brantly, for example, is now recovering from the deadly virus in Atlanta for the 21-day incubation period after treating patients in Africa. According to the World Health Organization, at least 170 African health workers treating patients with Ebola have contracted it themselves. More than 80 of them have died.

Health officials report that this six-month-long outbreak of Ebola is the largest ever observed. This is the first time the disease, which results in a hemorrhagic fever, has ever been observed in West Africa. It is also the first time the disease has reached densely populated urban areas. The case mortality rate for Ebola varies between 50 and 90 percent.

This morning’s media briefing in Boston was the first of many public awareness campaign steps city health officials are taking in order to prepare Massachusetts and Boston in the case of an outbreak.

“As a result of years of practice, investment and responding to real emergencies, hospitals in Boston are well equipped and trained to appropriately and safely care for a suspect case of EVD,” said John Erwin, executive director of the [Conference of Boston Teaching Hospitals](#). “To ensure the best possible preparations, however, hospitals will need the support of city, state and federal health officials. That’s why this planning effort is so important.”

Part of preventing the virus from arriving in the United States is discouraging Americans from traveling to the affected countries and possibly carrying the virus back home with them. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have issued a travel advisory, warning US residents to avoid all nonessential travel to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

“Every successful preparedness campaign requires the support and strong involvement of the community,” said Atyia Martin, director of the BPHC Public Health Preparedness Program. “We will work hard to make sure that residents have the information and resources that they need to stay informed and healthy. That is what this effort is all about.”

Learn more about the Ebola and the city’s public awareness campaign at [bphc.org/ebola](http://bphc.org/ebola).