



[Metro.us](#) ▶ [News](#) ▶ [Local](#)
By [Morgan Rousseau](#)

Published: August 20, 2014

Boston Ebola preparations continue despite low-risk of local outbreak



Massachusetts General Hospital. - Credit: Nicolaus Czarniecki/METRO

A Boston Ebola outbreak is unlikely, according to local health officials, but that won't stop them from being prepared.

Boston public health and medical officials met Wednesday to discuss plans they are taking to protect and educate the public if a suspected case is identified in the city.

"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. "We want a well-coordinated plan in place in the event a case of [Ebola] is found in the city."

The Ebola virus is a serious illness that is spread when a person comes in contact with the body fluids like blood, urine, stool, saliva, sweat, semen or breast milk of an infected person. The virus is not spread through the air or through water, but can be spread through direct contact with Ebola infected animals.

At Wednesday's meeting, Boston public health leaders and emergency medical officials described plans to:

-Monitor for and **detect** suspect cases early so that response measures can be implemented;

-Partner with hospitals, EMS and other key federal, and state agencies to care for patients and protect health care staff, and;

-Perform outreach and education in the community to raise awareness about EVD, its causes and how to prevent transmission.

"We know that an important step in preventing the spread of infectious disease is identifying when the illness is in our community," said Dr. Anita Barry, director of Infectious Disease Bureau at BPHC. "We will rely on our tried and true methods of disease surveillance, and our strong partnership with health care facilities and other agencies throughout Boston to assure a heightened state of watchfulness for [Ebola]."

Because the identification, treatment, and containment of most infectious diseases cases usually begins with an alert, well-informed health care professional, Dr. Barry said the Commission has shared advisories and guidance for healthcare providers on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of the illness, and how to report suspect cases to public health authorities.

In good hands

For years the city's public health, hospitals, EMS and other agencies have prepared for and practiced what to do in response to a wide variety of emergencies, including infectious disease outbreaks.

"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.

Boston EMS, the city's EMS provider, is also making preparations in the event a case of Ebola is discovered in the city. EMS officials said its personnel are trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of hemorrhagic diseases like Ebola, and that each ambulance is stocked with equipment to protect patients and EMS staff.

"Through both training and experience, our EMTs and paramedics are well-prepared to safely care for and transport patients with infectious diseases," said Jim Hooley, Chief of

Boston EMS. “Our planning will ensure the highest level of precautions in the event that a suspect case of EVD needs to be transported for care.”

Informing the Public

In addition to disease surveillance and response planning activities, health officials are also stepping up public education efforts on Ebola. The BPHC has posted a factsheet, translated in French for residents on its website, bphc.org/ebola and is also working closely with groups that serve the needs of the West African immigrant community in Boston.

“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.”

Follow Morgan Rousseau on Twitter: [@MetroMorgan](https://twitter.com/MetroMorgan)

Follow Metro Boston on Twitter: [@MetroBOS](https://twitter.com/MetroBOS)

