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TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Michael Wolf, Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Advice for Colleges, Universities, and Students about Ebola in West Africa
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
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COUNTY:	Statewide
MUNICIPALITY:	Statewide
ZIP CODE:	Statewide

This transmission is a “Health Advisory”: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

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PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

The Pennsylvania Department of Health is forwarding information to colleges and universities, titled “Advice for Colleges, Universities, and Students about Ebola in West Africa” from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Additional key information, can be found at the following link: <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/hcp/monitoring-and-movement-of-persons-with-exposure.html>

Advice for Colleges, Universities, and Students about Ebola in West Africa

Is it safe to travel to countries where the Ebola outbreaks are occurring (Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria)? What should we do if we have study abroad, foreign exchange, research, or other education-related travel planned to these countries?

- CDC has posted Warning – Level 3 Travel Notices recommending that people avoid non-essential travel to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone at this time. We advise that education-related travel to these countries be postponed until further notice.

- CDC has posted an Alert – Level 2 Travel Notice for Nigeria with recommendations for enhanced precautions to help travelers protect themselves and help prevent the spread of Ebola. These recommendations may change as the situation evolves. In the event that the situation worsens in Nigeria, CDC may recommend against non-essential travel to Nigeria. Colleges and universities should consider this possibility when deciding whether to proceed with education-related travel plans in Nigeria.
- The US Department of State takes action to protect US citizens who travel outside the US through a number of diplomatic channels. However, in the event of an outbreak, any country has the right to enact measures (such as quarantine of exposed people, isolation of sick people, and screening of people entering or exiting the country for sickness or disease exposure) to protect its citizens and to prevent the spread of an outbreak to other countries. These measures may infringe on the individual rights of those who appear to be infected with or exposed to a disease of public health concern—including visiting US citizens. The ability of the U.S. Department of State to intervene in such situations is limited. See the US Department of State’s [Emergency Resources](#) page for more information.
- Visit the CDC [Travel Health Notices](#) page for the most up-to-date guidance and recommendations for each country, including information about health screening of incoming and outgoing travelers and restrictions on travel within countries.

Why is CDC recommending that U.S. residents avoid traveling to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone?

- CDC’s recommendations against non-essential travel, including education-related travel, are intended to help control the outbreak and prevent continued spread in two ways: to protect the health of US residents who would be traveling to the affected areas and to enable the governments of countries where Ebola outbreaks are occurring to respond most effectively to contain the outbreak.
- The health care systems of countries where the Ebola outbreak is occurring are being severely strained as the outbreak grows. Even if students and faculty are not planning to be in contact with people who are sick with Ebola (such as in health care settings), other safety factors related to their travel need to be considered. For example, a traveler injured in a car accident may have to visit a hospital where Ebola patients are being cared for, which could put the person at risk. Also, because the health care system is severely strained, resources may not be available to treat both routine emergency health needs among visiting US citizens.

How long is the outbreak going to last? Will it be safe to travel in the spring semester?

- Although it is impossible to predict with complete certainty, it could take a minimum of six months to get the outbreak under control. The ministries of health in the countries where the Ebola outbreaks are happening are working in collaboration with the World Health Organization, CDC, and others to respond. However, due to the complicated nature of the outbreak, these countries face many challenges. Universities should consider the likelihood that the outbreak could continue for several months and that CDC’s recommendation to avoid non-essential travel may remain in place for as long as the outbreak lasts. This might mean not traveling to the affected area during the spring semester if the outbreak is still ongoing.

Is education-related travel to other countries in the West Africa region safe?

- At this time, there is no risk of contracting Ebola in other countries in the West Africa region where Ebola cases have not been reported. However the situation could change rapidly.
- To stay up to date, check reliable news sources, stay in touch with your university's local contacts, and check for updated information on CDC's [Traveler's Health website](#).

What are the special recommendations for student health centers?

- CDC recommendations for student health centers are the same as those for other US health care workers and settings.
- Student health center clinicians should refer to the [CDC Ebola Virus Disease Information for Clinicians in US Healthcare Settings](#) for more information on symptoms, exposure risks, and infection control measures.
- While Ebola poses little risk to the US general population, clinicians are advised to be alert for signs and symptoms of Ebola in patients who have a recent (within 21 days) travel history to countries where the outbreak is occurring or have had contact with a person infected with Ebola. In the event that a potential case is identified, clinicians should isolate the patient pending diagnostic testing.
- Although not a full list of precautions, student health center clinicians should be sure to follow these steps when caring for [someone who is sick or may be sick with Ebola](#):
 - Separate patient in a private room with its own bathroom.
 - Use proper [infection prevention and control measures](#); standard, contact, and droplet precautions are recommended if Ebola is suspected.
 - Wear the right [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#), including masks, gloves, gowns, facemask and eye protection, when entering the patient care area. Before leaving the patient area, carefully remove PPE and make sure not to contaminate your skin and clothing. Dispose of PPE as biohazard waste.
 - After removing PPE, wash your hands using soap and water (preferred) or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol. Use soap and water when hands are visibly dirty.
 - Notify your local or state health department immediately if Ebola is suspected. The health department can provide additional guidance regarding medical evaluation or testing, if indicated.
 - Follow protocols for cleaning and disinfecting reusable medical equipment and proper disposal of needles and other disposable equipment.

Should colleges and universities isolate or quarantine students and faculty who have recently returned to the US from countries where the Ebola outbreaks are occurring?

- CDC is not recommending colleges and universities isolate or quarantine students, faculty, or staff based on travel history alone.
- Colleges and universities should identify students, faculty, and staff who have been in countries where Ebola outbreaks are occurring within the past 21 days and should conduct a risk assessment with each identified person to determine his or her [level of risk exposure](#) (high- or low-risk exposures, or no known exposure).

- All students, faculty, and staff who have been in these countries within the past 21 days should be given instructions for health monitoring (see below).
- If a student, faculty, or staff member has had a high- or low-risk exposure, state or local public health authorities should be notified, and school officials should consult with public health authorities for guidance about how that person should be monitored. Anyone with a potential exposure should receive thorough education about immediately reporting symptoms and staying away from other people if symptoms develop.
- In the event that a person who has had a high- or low-risk exposure develops symptoms consistent with Ebola, the person should be medically evaluated while following recommended infection control precautions. Guidance is available in the [CDC Ebola Virus Disease Information for Clinicians in U.S. Healthcare Settings](#). Public health authorities should be notified.

What can colleges and universities do to keep people on campus safe from Ebola?

Ensure that student health center staff are aware of exposure risks, signs and symptoms of Ebola and are prepared to follow recommendations in the [CDC Health Advisory: Guidelines for Evaluation of US Patients Suspected of Having Ebola Virus Disease](#).

- Provide Ebola education to all people who have recently arrived from countries where outbreaks are occurring covering the following topics:
 - Self-monitoring for symptoms
 - Reporting procedures for those who develop symptoms
 - Importance of immediately reporting symptoms and staying separated from other people as soon as symptoms develop
- Consider posting information in dorms and other campus buildings with recommendations for people who have recently arrived from countries where Ebola outbreaks are occurring.
 - [Infographic: Recently in West Africa?](#)
 - [Additional Ebola Outbreak Infographics](#)

FOR STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND STAFF WHO HAVE RECENTLY TRAVELED TO COUNTRIES WHERE THE EBOLA OUTBREAKS ARE HAPPENING

What should I do if I have traveled to one of the countries where the Ebola outbreaks are happening?

See CDC's [Interim Guidance for Monitoring and Movement of Persons with Ebola Virus Disease Exposure](#) to learn about your risk level.

Pay attention to your health after you return:

- Monitor your health for 21 days.
 - Take your temperature every morning and evening.
 - Watch for other Ebola symptoms: severe headache, muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, or unexplained bleeding or bruising.
 - If your temperature is above 101.5°F (38.6°C) or you have any other Ebola signs or symptoms, **seek medical care immediately.**

- Call and tell the doctor about your recent travel and your symptoms before you go to the doctor's office or hospital. Advance notice will help the doctor care for you and protect other people who may be in the doctor's office or hospital.
- Limit your contact with other people when you travel to the doctor; avoid public transportation.
- Do not travel anywhere except to the doctor's office or hospital.
- Limit your contact with other people if you are sick. Do not go to work, classes, or other student activities until you have been medically evaluated.
- During the time that you are monitoring your health, if you have no symptoms, you can continue your normal activities, including work and school. If you get symptoms of Ebola, it is important to stay separated from other people and to call your doctor right away.

What should I do if I have traveled to one of the countries where the Ebola outbreaks are happening and have been exposed to Ebola?

- If you were exposed to people who had Ebola, or their blood or body fluids, talk with a school administrator or student health center staff even if you do not have symptoms. They will tell you what school-specific instructions you should follow. A doctor should evaluate your exposure level and symptoms if you have them and consult with public health authorities to determine if actions— such as medical evaluation and testing for Ebola, monitoring, or travel restrictions— are needed.
- Follow the instructions above for monitoring your health.

What should I do to protect my health if I come in contact with people on campus who have recently returned from a country where the Ebola outbreaks are happening?

- Ebola poses little risk to the US general population and is not contagious until symptoms appear. It is spread through **direct contact** with body fluids (blood, urine, feces, saliva, semen, and other secretions) of an infected person, or with objects like needles that have been contaminated with body secretions. This includes through intimate contact, such as sex, since Ebola can still be found in semen for 7 weeks after a person has recovered.
- It is always good to avoid contact with anyone who is sick and to wash your hands regularly. Use soap and water if available, or use hand sanitizer. Doing so can help you prevent getting sick from many different illnesses.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of September 4, 2014, but may be modified in the future.
