




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Charlene Russell-Tucker, Chief Operating Officer 

DATE: October 24, 2014

SUBJECT: Ebola Preparedness Guidance

There are currently no cases of Ebola in Connecticut and the risk of an outbreak in our country remains low. With that said, Connecticut has taken several proactive measures to control the spread of the Ebola virus in the event of confirmed cases in the future should such an instance occur.

- The Department of Public Health (DPH) has launched a website to provide residents with accurate information and helpful guidance. This website can be found here: <http://www.ct.gov/ebola>.
- Governor Malloy signed an executive order to grant authority to the Public Health Commissioner to quarantine or isolate an individual, or group of individuals, potentially exposed to or infected with the Ebola virus.
- The Department of Public Health has requested that all hospitals conduct an assessment of their readiness to detect, protect and respond to patients infected with Ebola.
- Governor Malloy convened a Unified Command Team (UCT) to ensure statewide coordination in the ongoing emergency management efforts and also to provide clear communication to the public. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is a member of the UCT, with DPH taking the lead role.
- The United Way's 2-1-1 is also a resource equipped to handle inquiries regarding the Ebola virus. Residents with questions or concerns can call 2-1-1 at any time to speak with a call specialist. Multilingual assistance and TDD are also available.

We understand that you might proactively be reviewing your own preparedness. At the local level, there are several proactive measures that you can consider implementing to reinforce your district's preparedness. Some of the following recommendations are simply reinforcing best practices that should already be employed by your staff and students, while others are grounded in guidance issued by DPH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). All of the following suggestions have been reviewed by our partners at DPH.

- Educate school staff, including teachers, paraprofessionals, school custodians, food service staff and office staff about the basics of what Ebola is and what it is *not*. It is important that they receive accurate information from a reliable authority on the subject, such as school nurses or school medical advisors. This will help guard against the susceptibility for individuals to rely on misinformation in the absence of good information. According to the CDC:
 - A person **cannot** get Ebola through air, through water, or through food.
 - Ebola is **only** transmitted when a person comes into direct contact with an infected person's blood and/or bodily fluids.
 - Ebola is only contagious when an infected individual is presenting symptoms.

Here is a useful, clear fact sheet regarding what everyone should know about Ebola: <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/what-need-to-know-ebola.pdf>. Information is also available in Spanish: <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/facts-about-ebola-spanish.pdf> and French: <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/facts-about-ebola-french.pdf>.

- Take this opportunity to reinforce good habits for controlling the spread of germs. Post developmentally appropriate posters in conspicuous places to serve as reminders to students and staff on proper hand washing techniques and overall healthy habits for covering coughs and sneezes. <http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/pdf/wash-your-hands-poster.pdf>.
- There is no need to conduct a deep cleaning of school facilities at this time. However, reinforce proper cleaning and disinfection procedures with custodial staff. Ensure that they are up to date on DPH's cleaning guidance specific to schools: http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/communications/ebola/clean_disinfect_indoor_spaces.pdf.
- Ensure that all staff members have the opportunity to attend an OSHA required Standard Precautions in-service training. Usually provided by school nurses, this is provided annually to all staff at the beginning of the school year. Consider advising your school medical advisors and school nurses to review and update, if necessary, their standard protocols regarding blood borne pathogens.

Additional Protocols to Consider

- Attached is guidance DPH sent to your school nurse supervisors on October 7. Please review this guidance with your school principals and school nurses. http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/communications/ebola/nurse_letter-ebola_.pdf

- Please consider incorporating the following questions into your district's interview process for new student enrollees. Additionally, school nurses should pose the same questions to students or staff exhibiting a fever or other [common symptoms of Ebola](#). These questions are:
 - 1) Within the previous 21 days, has the student or staff member traveled to a [country identified by the CDC](#) with an active outbreak?
 - 2) Has the student or staff had direct contact with a person infected with Ebola?

If the response to any of these questions is in the affirmative, please refer to the attached DPH guidance and contact both your local health department *and* DPH. If the individual responds in the affirmative to any of the above questions *and* is presenting any symptoms of Ebola, that person should be isolated immediately according to DPH guidance. Then the local health department and DPH should be contacted immediately for further guidance.

- DPH: (860) 509-7994 or (860) 509-8000 after hours and on weekends
- Local health departments:
<http://www.ct.gov/dph/cwp/view.asp?a=3123&q=397740>
- At the moment, the CDC has only identified Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone as countries with an active outbreak. However, it is advisable that the CDC list posted on its website be consulted frequently in the event that countries are cleared or any other countries are identified. <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/index.html>.
- Working together, the school principal and school nurse should at this time identify an appropriate room for placing a person in isolation, in the event that such a course of action would be required in the future.

Again, some of the most cautious and preventative steps to take at the moment are to encourage best practices that should already be in place. We appreciate the uniqueness of our districts and communities and understand that, sometimes, the needs of each locale differ from that of neighboring communities. That is why, above all, we encourage you to work with your school nurses, medical advisors, local health department and DPH. During this time of heightened caution, the CSDE will continue to provide a supportive role and to connect you with reliable resources and sound information.