



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA RELEASE

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SOUTH AFRICA IS ON HIGH ALERT - NO NEED TO PANIC

Pretoria, July 30, 2014 – The Department of Health is on high alert following the reported outbreak of the ebola virus in West Africa and would like to assure South Africans that there is no need to panic at all as all precautions are taken to prevent the virus.

"Our surveillance activities are extremely effective", says Minister Motsoaldi

The key response of the Department of Health are the following:

- Inform all stakeholders (both public and private) of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in West Africa and request that they increase their surveillance activities.
- Sensitise all outbreak response teams of the outbreak and the risks of imported cases entering South Africa. Outbreak response teams were alerted to be prepared to respond in the event a suspected case was identified in the country.

Following the first report of an EVD outbreak in Guinea, the National Department of Health, with support from the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) drafted an alert and case definition, that were distributed to the Environmental Health Directorate (including Port Health), provinces and the Civil Aviations Authority (CAA), for further circulation to all stakeholders.

The CAA convened a meeting with stakeholders on 9 April 2014 to alert them of the outbreak and address challenges that might be experienced. The National Department of Health participated in the meeting and highlighted the International Health Regulations (IHR) issues related to EVD.

The Department has been monitoring the EVD outbreak in West Africa through updates provided by the NICD, Promed, WHO and the US-CDC. Updates are provided to stakeholders for further circulation as they became available. This is important to keep stakeholders informed and to ensure that response capacity is maintained.

Port Health officials are on high alert since the beginning of the outbreak.

The National Department of Health, circulated an alert and case definitions to the Environmental Health Directorate (including Port Health), provinces and the Civil Aviations Authority, for further circulation following the first report of EVD outbreak in Guinea.

The alert emphasised that all Port Health Officials should be aware of the EVD outbreak and have a high index of suspicion for travellers with the EVD signs and symptoms. It also emphasised that all health care workers should have a high index of suspicion for EVD when managing patients with a travel history to West Africa.

The National Health Laboratory Services and the NICD have also intensified their surveillance at the laboratories.

The private sector (laboratories and hospitals) are also kept informed of the EVD situation during the monthly Multi-sectoral Outbreak Response Team (MNORT) meetings that are convened by the National Department of Health.

The OR Tambo International Airport and Lanseria Airport have thermal scanners that detect travelers with raised temperatures. These travellers, when identified, are assessed at the medical facilities at these airports.

The CAA represents more than 4,000 officials in the aviation industry (both public and private sector). The CAA held a meeting where all the stakeholders in the aviation industry were briefed on the EVD situation in West Africa. The risks and the steps to mitigate the risks of importing an infected person into South Africa were discussed. Organisations that transport sick patients into South Africa for treatment were also represented at the meeting.

All health care workers (both public and private) were informed to be on high alert for travellers who have visited West Africa.

An alert was circulated the day after the announcement of the EVD outbreak was made by the World Health Organisation.

Updates informing stakeholders of the EVD situation are circulated as they become available.

The Department of Health is closely monitoring the Ebola situation in West Africa and has taken the necessary steps to detect and treat cases if they arrive in the country.

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