How We’re Preparing for Ebola in Minnesota

Since early July 2014, when the Ebola outbreak in West Africa greatly intensified, the Minnesota Department of Health has been engaged in a wide range of activities with a variety of partners to prepare for the possibility of an Ebola case in the state which would require a coordinated response. Here is what we have done to date.

Outreach

- Engaging with key community leaders from the three West African countries most affected by the Ebola outbreak (Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea), as well as concerned leaders from the larger communities in which they live.
- Providing community organization partners with advice and technical information.
- Connecting local Liberian leaders to the outreach being done by CDC – they are now part of a weekly call CDC is doing with Liberian leaders in the United States.
- Assisting in planning for three community information sessions by providing leadership, consultation, messaging, and presenters.
- Working with diverse media partners to place Ebola ads and articles in community digital and print media (examples: Mshale, The African News Journal, PepperSoup) as well as mainstream media reaching the broader community that has large West African populations (example: Sun Post).
- Providing spokespersons for a variety of radio programs to share information on Ebola (examples: KMOJ, KFAI, MPR).
- Placing radio public service announcements on a variety of ethnic shows through KFAI – Fresh Air Radio.
- Establishing a public information line for Minnesotans to ask questions about Ebola.
- Sharing information through www.health.state.mn.us/ebola and social media.

Health Education

- Creating a Frequently Asked Questions document on our website based on questions received from community meetings, information sessions, and phone calls.
- Providing email updates to key leaders from the Minnesota Liberian, Guinean, and Sierra Leonean communities.
- Disseminating messages and materials to professionals working with immigrants/refugees, community-based organizations, as well as diverse media vendors.
- Translating a fact sheet and CDC infographic into French, Somali, Hmong, and Spanish.

Health Care Preparations

- Engaging in ongoing communication with hospitals, local public health agencies, infection preventionists, infectious disease physicians, laboratorians, Minnesota Hospital Association, regional health care coalitions, and other medical partners to discuss Ebola preparedness, identify needs and discuss plans for addressing those needs, including:
  - Developing clinical assessment tools.
  - Reviewing infection control policies and procedures.
  - Assisting with training and practices in use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Communicating with health care partners on new and revised CDC guidance.
- Conducting weekly Ebola planning calls with eight regional health care coalitions.
- Participating in conference calls and regular communications with the Minnesota Hospital Association (MHA) for coordination of planning efforts.
- Working with medical examiners on plans for safe handling and disposition of bodies of deceased Ebola patients.
- Purchasing thermometers for use in contact monitoring.
- Communicating with EMS/first responders on handling suspect Ebola patients and providing CDC guidance on protective measures.
- Reviewing materials developed by other agencies and states to determine what can be adapted for use in Minnesota.
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- Working with CDC, USDA, and the American Veterinary Medical Association Concern on questions regarding pets and Ebola.
- Providing MDH staff for presentations at physician grand rounds (such as infectious disease doctors and infection preventionists) at hospitals and for other groups.
- Partnering with the Minnesota Medical Association (MMA) to get information to their members through articles published in Minnesota Medicine and providing speakers for member meetings and conferences.
- Communicating Ebola situation updates to local public health agencies, who can send that information to health care partners in their area. Updates include letters, health alerts or other messages sent to public health partners or concerned constituents, such as school superintendents, college and university health officials or administrators, health care workers and hospitals, and others.
- Providing information and recommendations to school nurses, superintendents, and administrators and health centers at colleges and universities.
- Working with Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to address issues related to the clean-up and disposal of infectious waste from Ebola patients at health care facilities or those isolated in private homes or other lodging.
- Reviewing isolation and quarantine plans and encouraging local public health agencies to review their plans and procedures. MDH has put in place the legal framework so that steps could quickly be taken to implement isolation and quarantine measures while protecting the rights of citizens.
- Meeting with staff at the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport CDC Quarantine Station.
- Planning and preparing for active 21-day monitoring of individuals who have traveled to the three affected West Africa countries.

**Minnesota’s Public Health Laboratory (MN-PHL) Preparations:**

- Preparing to perform Ebola testing.
- Enhancing safety protocols to ensure laboratory worker safety.
- Training staff on the handling and testing of suspect Ebola specimens.
- Increased staffing levels for 24/7 testing.
- Conducting laboratory exercises to practice mock samples and safety procedures.
- Providing communications via the Minnesota Laboratory System (MLS) with information on Ebola.