

US watches airline passengers for Ebola symptoms

August 4 2014, by Anne Flaherty

Government agents at U.S. airports are watching travelers from Africa for flu-like symptoms that could be tied to the recent Ebola outbreak, as delegations from some 50 countries arrive in the nation's capital for a leadership summit this week.

Border patrol agents at Washington's Dulles International and New York's JFK airports in particular have been told to ask travelers about possible exposure to the virus and to be on the lookout for anyone with a fever, headache, achiness, sore throat, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, rash or red eyes. Andrews Air Force Base in suburban Maryland, which will receive several African heads of state, is screening passengers too, while U.S. Secret Service agents in charge of security for the three-day summit have been briefed on what to look for and how to respond, officials said Monday.

If a passenger is suspected of carrying the [deadly virus](#), they would be quarantined immediately and evaluated by medical personnel, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which provided the additional training to local airports.

"There is always the possibility that someone with an infectious disease can enter the United States," CDC spokeswoman Barbara Reynolds said Monday. "The public health concern is whether it would spread, and, if so, how quickly."

The Ebola virus causes a hemorrhagic fever that has sickened more than

1,300 people in Africa, killing more than 700 mostly in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. It is spread through direct contact with bodily fluids, such as blood or urine, unlike an airborne virus like influenza or the common cold. A person exposed to the virus can take up to 21 days to exhibit any symptoms, making it possible for infected travelers to enter the U.S. without knowing they have it.

While the CDC says it is not screening passengers boarding planes at African airports—the job of local authorities there—the center said it has encouraged vulnerable countries to follow certain precautions. Outbound passengers in the countries experiencing Ebola are being screened for fevers and with health questionnaires, Reynolds said.

Health officials say the threat to Americans remains relatively small, even with the uptick in travel this week between Africa and the United States. In the past decade, five people have entered the U.S. known to have a viral [hemorrhagic fever](#), including a case last March of a Minnesota man diagnosed with Lassa Fever after traveling to West Africa.

Reynolds said in all five instances, U.S. officials were able to contain the illness.

A vaccine against Ebola has been successfully tested with monkeys, and there is hope it could become available as early as next July, Dr. Anthony Fauci of the National Institutes of Health told "CBS This Morning" television on Monday.

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