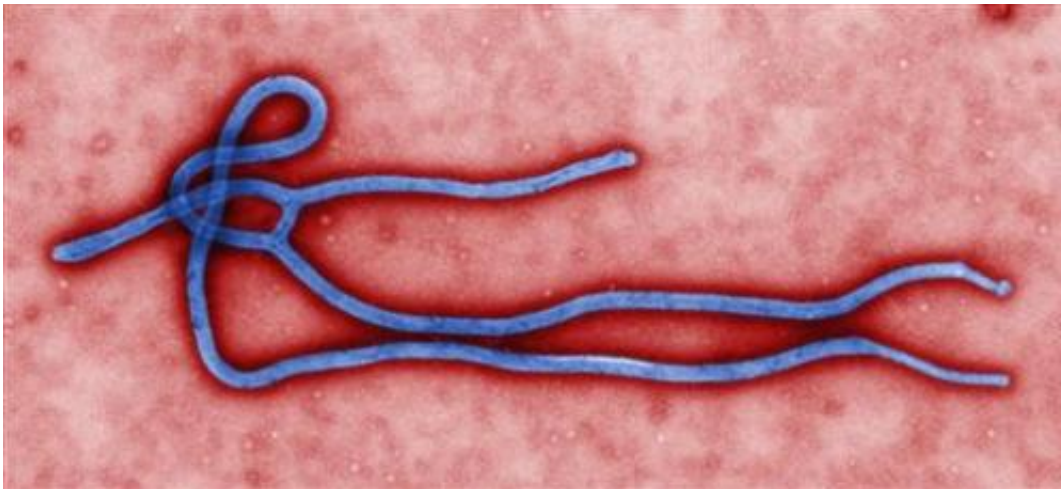


US warns against traveling to Ebola-hit countries

August 1 2014, by Mike Stobbe



In this undated file image by the CDC shows an ebola Virus. U.S. health officials on Thursday, July 31, 2014, warned Americans not to travel to the three African countries, hit by an outbreak of Ebola. The travel advisory applies to non-essential travel to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. (AP Photo/CDC, File)

(AP)—U.S. health officials on Thursday warned Americans not to travel to the three West African countries hit by the worst recorded Ebola outbreak in history.

The travel advisory applies to nonessential travel to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, where the deadly disease has killed more than 700 people this year.

"The bottom line is, Ebola is worsening in West Africa," said Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who announced the travel warning.

He called Ebola "a tragic, dreadful and merciless virus."

The purpose of the travel warning is to not only protect U.S. travelers, but limit their use of overburdened clinics and hospitals for injuries or other illnesses, he said.

The last time the CDC issued a high-level warning was in 2003 because of a SARS outbreak in Asia. The World Health Organization, however, has not issued a similar travel warning for the West Africa region.

The current outbreak is the largest since the disease first emerged in Africa nearly 40 years ago. The virus is contagious and is spread by direct contact with blood or bodily fluids from a sick person. Ebola can't be spread like flu through casual contact or breathing in the same air.

Experts estimate that in this outbreak, about 60 percent of the people who have gotten sick with Ebola have died—a frightening fatality rate that is among the highest of any disease. There is no vaccine and no specific treatment.

The two American aid workers in Liberia diagnosed with Ebola are Dr. Kent Brantly and Nancy Writebol, who work for North Carolina-based aid groups. Writebol was getting an experimental treatment, the mission groups said Thursday.

"I remain hopeful and believing that Kent will be healed from this dreadful disease," Brantly's wife, Amber, said in a statement released by the aid group he works with, Samaritan's Purse. She and the couple's two young children left Liberia for Texas before her husband was infected,

and she said they are fine.

At the White House, press secretary Josh Earnest said the U.S. was looking into options to bring the two workers back. While the U.S. would facilitate the trip, private companies would be used to transport them.

On Thursday afternoon, officials at Atlanta's Emory University Hospital said they expected one of the Americans to be transferred there "within the next several days." The hospital declined to identify which aid worker, citing privacy laws.

The hospital, which is near the CDC's main campus, has a special isolation unit built in collaboration with the CDC. It is one of only four facilities of its kind in the United States.

The CDC has about two dozen staffers in West Africa to help try to control the outbreak. Frieden said the CDC will send 50 more in the next month. CDC workers in Africa also are helping at airports to help screen passengers, he said.

The CDC has said the risk of the Ebola virus coming to the United States remains small. On Monday, the agency sent a health alert to U.S. doctors, stressing that they should ask about foreign travel by patients who come down with Ebola-like symptoms, including fever, headache, vomiting and diarrhea.

Even if someone infected with Ebola came to the U.S., the risk of an [outbreak](#) is considered very low, Frieden said. Patients are contagious only when they show symptoms, and U.S. hospitals are well equipped to isolate cases and control spread of the virus.

Frieden also noted that relatively few people travel from West Africa to

the United States. He said about 10,000 travelers from those countries come to the United States in an average three- or four-month period, and most do not arrive on direct flights.

The CDC has staff at 20 U.S. airports and border crossings. They evaluate any travelers with signs of dangerous infectious diseases, and isolate them when necessary. The agency is prepared to increase that staffing if needed, he said.

White House reporter Josh Lederman contributed from Washington.

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