

Australian who worked with Ebola victims tested for virus

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An Australian woman was being assessed Thursday for Ebola after developing a fever following her return from a month working with patients of the virus in Sierra Leone, officials said.

Queensland state chief health officer Jeanette Young said the 57-year-old volunteer Red Cross nurse developed a "low-grade fever" on Thursday morning and went to Cairns Hospital, where she was put into isolation.

Blood was taken from her and sent to Brisbane by plane for testing, with results expected on Friday.

"There is the potential there so that's why we're treating this so seriously," Young said, adding that the woman reported that while in Sierra Leone she wore protective equipment at all times.

"We don't know whether she has that (Ebola) but she's been exposed to people with the disease while working in Sierra Leone and she now has a low-grade fever."

Australia has seen a handful of people displaying symptoms of Ebola following trips to Africa, but none have so far proved positive.

The woman, named as Sue-Ellen Kovack by local media, returned to Australia at the weekend and had been in home isolation since.

This is in line with government policy that anyone who may have had contact with Ebola patients must abide by a 21-day incubation period at home alone.

Ebola, the US Centers for Disease Control has said, is not contagious until symptoms appear.

"She's done everything appropriately. She's come back into the country, she was perfectly well at that time, she had no symptoms, no fever," said Young.

"It's only since this morning that she's had low-grade fever. There's no need for any community concern at all."

Health Minister Peter Dutton said Australia was well-equipped to respond swiftly to any serious cases in the region.

"We would be expected within our region to rapidly respond, and we have the capacity to do that with a team out of Darwin... and resources within Canberra," he said in comments reported by the Australian Associated Press.

The world's largest outbreak of Ebola has killed 3,865 people out of 8,033 infected so far this year, mainly in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, according to the World Health Organisation's latest count.

The spillover of the virus—with the first death in the United States and the first case of infection in Spain—has raised fears of contagion in the West.

Earlier Thursday, Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott said the country was doing all it could to prevent the disease from breaching its borders.

"It's not impossible that it will come here, but what we're doing at the moment is we're carefully monitoring everyone coming to this country who's been in West Africa," he said.

"In every state, public hospitals have been prepared to deal with Ebola cases should we get any."

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