

US, Canada increase Ebola screenings as toll nears 3,900

October 9 2014, by Kerry Sheridan

The United States and Canada announced stepped-up airport screening measures Wednesday to look for passengers carrying Ebola, as the deadly virus killed a man in Texas and the worldwide toll neared 3,900.

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

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 Organization's latest count.

But the WHO sought to contain concerns of a wider outbreak in Europe after a Spanish nurse was infected, with regional director Zsuzsanna Jakab saying sporadic cases in Europe were "unavoidable" but the risk of a full outbreak was "extremely low."

In Washington, officials announced increased screening at five major airports including in New York, Washington, Chicago, Atlanta and New Jersey.

And Canadian health minister Rona Ambrose said passengers arriving from west African countries affected by the epidemic must go through tightened controls, though she didn't specify where these would take place.

Meanwhile, two people were hospitalized in Los Angeles and Dallas for possible exposure to Ebola.

The Los Angeles case, concerning a patient who'd traveled to Liberia, turned out to be a false alarm.

In the Dallas case, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention chief Tom Frieden said, "there is someone who does not have either definite contact with Ebola or definite symptoms of Ebola who is being assessed."

Ebola is transmitted by close contact with the bodily fluids of a person who is showing symptoms of infection such as fever, aches, vomiting and diarrhea, or who has recently died of the hemorrhagic virus, experts say.

US death

Thomas Eric Duncan became the first patient cared for in the United States to die of Ebola, said Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas.

Duncan died 10 days after he was admitted and despite receiving an experimental drug to fight off the illness.

"Mr. Duncan succumbed to an insidious disease, Ebola. He fought courageously in this battle," a hospital statement read.

Duncan is believed to have been infected with Ebola before he left Liberia and boarded a plane to visit family in Texas.

The CDC has said there was "zero risk" he had infected any fellow travelers because he was not symptomatic until days after the flight.

News of Duncan's diagnosis led to a spike of suspected Ebola cases and forced governments to consider stronger methods of keeping the virus at bay.

Hours after Duncan died, the White House announced the stricter screenings, which will be implemented beginning Saturday.

They include sending extra CDC staff to airports and taking the temperatures of people arriving from Ebola-hit nations.

The "vast majority of people" coming from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone—the three countries hit hardest by the epidemic—will be screened, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said.

CDC chief Frieden said about 150 travelers come to the United States daily from the affected region, and described the screening measures as "manageable."

President Barack Obama called the screening "an added layer of protection on top of the procedures already in place."

Spanish fears mount

In Spain, five people were isolated and dozens more monitored after a nurse in Madrid apparently caught Ebola while treating two elderly missionaries who died of the disease.

One of the doctors treating Teresa Romero, the first person to contract Ebola outside West Africa, said she may have caught the [deadly virus](#) after touching her face with an infected glove.

As Spain scrambled to identify people who came into contact with Romero, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy called for calm and promised

"transparency."

Spain's handling of the affair came into question after it emerged that the nurse fell ill on September 30 while on leave after treating the missionaries, but she wasn't admitted to hospital until six days later.

The nurse had gone to her family doctor during this period but "hid the fact that she was a nurse that had been in direct contact with an Ebola patient," said Javier Gonzalez, the director of the Madrid regional government health department.

US urges broader response

Meanwhile, US Secretary of State John Kerry said more countries must help in the fight against Ebola.

"I'm here this morning to make an urgent plea to countries in the world to step up even further," Kerry told reporters after talks with his British counterpart Philip Hammond.

Britain unveiled plans to send 750 military personnel as well as a medical ship and three helicopters to Sierra Leone.

The Pentagon also announced it was sending 100 Marines and six aircraft to Liberia to reinforce American efforts to combat the disease.

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Citation: US, Canada increase Ebola screenings as toll nears 3,900 (2014, October 9) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-10-canada-ebola-screenings-toll-nears.html>

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