

US Coast Guard sector issues new Ebola protocol

October 7 2014, by Jennifer Mcdermott

One U.S. Coast Guard sector says it will contact ships that have recently been to Ebola-affected countries to ask whether passengers have symptoms of the virus before they are allowed into port.

The sector, which includes parts of New York and Connecticut, issued a bulletin to the maritime community in New York's Long Island Sound on Monday that describes protocols being put into place due to Ebola.

The Coast Guard had issued a nationwide bulletin about Ebola in August, reminding vessels they are required to report if anyone on board was sick or had died within the last 15 days. Carlos Diaz, a Coast Guard spokesman, said local commands can supplement that message. But he did not know of any other sector doing so.

There is no specific threat for Long Island Sound, Diaz added.

The Coast Guard is evaluating each vessel headed into any U.S. port to determine if it had visited an Ebola-affected country within its last five ports of call, according to the national bulletin.

If a vessel coming to the Long Island Sound area has, the Coast Guard will ask whether anyone on board is experiencing symptoms of Ebola, such as fever, headache, joint and muscle aches, weakness, diarrhea, cough, hiccups, sore throat and other symptoms.

If so, the Coast Guard will ask how many people are sick, when the

symptoms started, whether they have been treated, if they have arranged for medical care and if they have been around anyone who is ill. It will also ask whether anyone plans to get on or off the ship once it gets to port.

Ships headed to American ports are required to report illnesses or death from communicable diseases among passengers or crew 15 days before they expect to arrive, according to the bulletin. It says there have been no reports of people infected with Ebola on any vessels operating in U.S. waters.

Diaz said the Coast Guard will work with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to review each situation. The Coast Guard can restrict a vessel's movement or bar entry to better evaluate the situation, he added.

The Obama administration has said it is considering whether to institute extra screening at airports to check passengers coming from Ebola-stricken countries. Health officials have said that might include checking travelers to see if they have a fever, then evaluating them further if they do.

The administration has said it will not halt travel from affected countries.

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Citation: US Coast Guard sector issues new Ebola protocol (2014, October 7) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-10-coast-issues-protocols-ebola.html>

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