

UAB developing training program on Ebola for first responders in Deep South

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First responders training for Ebola. Credit: UAB News

Serious health and safety concerns for health care, public safety and support service personnel arose after the 2014 Ebola virus disease that resulted in 11,000 deaths across multiple countries, with four confirmed

cases in the United States. In the event of an Ebola or other infectious disease outbreak, the responsibility for patient transfer, assessment and testing falls on the local health care and public safety systems.

Investigators at the University of Alabama at Birmingham recently received a grant to provide safety and [health training](#) to [health care](#) and [public safety](#) workers through the UAB Deep South Biosafety and Infectious Disease Response Training Consortium. Co-program directors, Lisa McCormick, Dr.P.H., and Marjorie Lee White, M.D., will develop and implement a training program to equip workers with the skills and knowledge needed to protect themselves and their communities from potential exposure to contaminated materials or infected individuals they may encounter.

"In August 2015, the Ebola scare was localized to Birmingham, where we had eight individuals exposed to a patient exhibiting Ebola-like symptoms, with six of those being first responders," said McCormick, associate professor at the UAB School of Public Health. "We want to increase the health care and public safety workforce's understanding of how [infectious diseases](#) are spread in an occupational environment and what measures can be taken to shield workers from potential exposure."

The Deep South region, including Mississippi, Alabama and the Florida Panhandle, contains a large number of medically underserved areas, health professional shortage areas, and health departments with limited budgets and limited access to professional occupational health and safety training programs. This has resulted in gaps in knowledge and skills in risk reduction and infection control procedures within the workforce.

The safety and health training programs will be geared toward public safety and [health care workers](#), including individuals not working in direct patient care roles who may be at risk during infectious disease outbreaks in the Deep South region. Funding for the program is from the

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

"Health care simulation is the ideal methodology for training practitioners who will care for patients with highly infectious diseases," said White, associate professor at the UAB Department of Pediatrics. "It allows for deliberate practice and mastery learning to keep providers and patients safe. Our program will focus on proper techniques and protocol for responding to Ebola or other infectious diseases that may threaten communities across the South."

The integrated training will provide information on infection control measures, other worker protection protocols, and practical, hands-on training using personal protective equipment in order to improve the skills and confidence of the workforce in responding to an Ebola or other infectious disease threat.

A Train-the-Trainer module will provide instructors with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to conduct trainings within their own organizations, as well as to others in their field. This new corps of workers will have the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the growing demands of the Deep South workforce.

"Overall, this program will allow training resources to be made available across the region and prepare workers to respond to [public health](#) crises and disasters," said McCormick.

The program is a collaboration of the UAB School of Public Health and School of Medicine with the University of Mississippi Medical Center and the Alabama Fire College's Workplace Safety Training Program, establishing a multistate geographical partnership.

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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