



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Oxiris Barbot, MD
Commissioner

2019 Health Advisory # 21: International travel-related disease preparedness update: Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in Saudi Arabia

Please Share this Alert with All Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, HIV Specialists, Infection Prevention and Control, Infectious Disease, Internal Medicine, Laboratory Medicine, Pediatrics, and Primary Care Staff in Your Facility.

- **The current risk is *low* that the Ebola virus will be introduced to New York City or the U.S.**
- **While there have been no reported cases of either EVD or MERS in New York City, we are urging providers to always take a detailed international travel history when patients present with an acute febrile illness.**
- **When patients present with acute febrile illness and recent international travel to countries where outbreaks of contagious, high-consequence diseases are taking place (e.g., EVD in the DRC) or are endemic (e.g., MERS in Saudi Arabia), immediately isolate the patient and use appropriate infection prevention and control measures when conducting clinical assessments.**
- **Call the Health Department's Provider Access Line (1-866-692-3641) when evaluating patients who may have a high-consequence infectious disease related to international travel.**

August 12, 2019

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department) reminds all healthcare providers to take a detailed travel history when patients present with an acute febrile illness and to remain alert to current international disease outbreaks of public health concern, including Ebola virus disease (EVD) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the ongoing MERS outbreak in Saudi Arabia, where millions of pilgrims are expected to arrive soon for the annual Hajj during August 9-14, 2019.

EVD outbreak in the DRC

On July 17, 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) in an area of the DRC which has been the scene of an EVD outbreak since August 2018. (For the most current outbreak information, refer to [WHO's weekly Ebola situation reports](#).¹)

WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) still consider the risk to be low that a person infected with Ebola virus will arrive undetected to the U.S. or Europe.¹

¹ World Health Organization [Internet]. Ebola situation reports: Democratic Republic of the Congo. Geneva (CH): World Health Organization; Ebola virus disease. Available at: <https://www.who.int/ebola/situation-reports/drc-2018/en/>

At this time, the Health Department, in consultation with the CDC, recommends for the New York City healthcare sector to take the following steps:

- **Remember that the New York State Health Commissioner’s Orders for the Prevention and Control of Ebola Virus Disease (2014) and the 2015 Update² are still in effect;** provisions in both orders must be complied with fully. Specifically, ensure that:
 - A sufficient number of personnel on each shift are trained in emergency departments (EDs) and other covered facilities to identify and isolate patients who present with febrile illness and a recent history of international travel;
 - The designated personnel on each shift have access to and are trained to correctly use the [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) recommended by CDC when evaluating and managing persons who may have EVD,³ and
 - Signs are posted in, at a minimum, English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Italian, Korean, and Haitian Creole that ask all persons presenting for care to report any international travel.
- In the near-term, provide refresher training in EDs for all security, triage, nursing, and medical staff on all shifts, reviewing facility protocols and staff responsibilities for rapidly identifying, isolating, and clinically assessing patients who may have a high-consequence infectious disease, based on their illness and international travel history.
- Review your facility’s 2014 EVD response plan and ensure that the plan can be implemented rapidly and efficiently in the event that the current EVD risk assessment in the DRC changes.
- **Stay aware of international infectious disease outbreaks.** The Health Department maintains [an online list of current domestic and international outbreaks](#) for New York City providers.⁴
- Consult with the Health Department whenever there is concern that a patient may have a high-consequence infectious disease related to international travel (e.g., Lassa fever, MERS, measles, or avian influenza).
- **The 24-hour number to report a disease to the Health Department is the Provider Access Line (PAL) at (866) 692-3641.**

MERS in Saudi Arabia

For the last two months, MERS cases have largely been reported in the Riyadh area, and to a lesser extent in the central al-Qassim and southern Najran regions. In late May, a MERS case was identified in Medina, where pilgrims also sometimes travel.⁴

The annual Hajj pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia is taking place during August 9 – 14, 2019. Providers are advised to ask patients with acute respiratory illness within 14 days of travel to Saudi Arabia whether they visited any other locations in Saudi Arabia in addition to Mecca. In past years, returning pilgrims were diagnosed with common viral respiratory infections (e.g., influenza, adenovirus, and enterovirus/rhinovirus).

² Go to <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/ebola/> and select “Ebola Preparedness: Commissioner’s Orders”

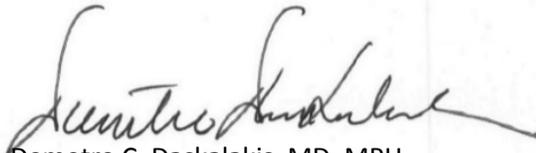
³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Internet]. Personal Protective Equipment (PPD). Atlanta (GA): CDC; Ebola (Ebola Virus Disease). Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/healthcare-us/ppe/index.html>

⁴ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene [Internet]. Current New York City, U.S. and International Infectious Disease Outbreaks. New York (NY): NYCDOHMH; Health Care Providers. Available at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/reporting-and-services-main.page>

Additional resources for outbreaks and travel-related illnesses

- CDC's EVD resources for clinicians: cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/clinicians
- The Health Department's *Current New York City, U.S., and International Infectious Disease Outbreaks*: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/providers/reporting-and-services-main.page>
- Travel Clinical Assistant (TCA): dph.georgia.gov/TravelClinicalAssistant
- CDC Travel Health Notices: wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices
- HealthMap (search for outbreaks by region, state or country): healthmap.org
- ProMED: promedmail.org

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Demetre Daskalakis", written over a light blue grid background.

Demetre C. Daskalakis, MD, MPH
Deputy Commissioner
Division of Disease Control