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Illinois Department of Public Health Issues Ebola Safety Guidance

CHICAGO – Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) Director Dr. LaMar Hasbrouck today provided further guidance on Illinois' Ebola safety guidelines, including mandatory home quarantines for individuals who have a high-risk of exposure to the virus.

“The Ebola safety guidance IDPH issued on Friday was designed to ensure that the public is protected without discouraging our health care workers from volunteering to fight this virus at its source,” Dr. Hasbrouck said. “These guidelines ensure that we appropriately address the risks posed by workers who have been directly exposed to the Ebola virus without the necessary protective gear or procedures. These individuals have a higher probability of becoming ill and a home quarantine is the most responsible way in which to manage this situation.”

The guidance on Friday was issued in light of the need for direction to local health departments about following up on passenger returning from Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) plans to issue guidance on this topic soon.

The IDPH guidance calls for a 21-day home quarantine for any returning traveler who has had high-risk exposures to Ebola.

High-risk in this context refers to anyone who:

- Had unprotected (percutaneous or mucous membrane) contact with infectious blood or body fluids of an Ebola patient.
- Made direct skin contact with blood or body fluids of an Ebola patient without appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Processed blood or body fluids of an Ebola patient without appropriate equipment or standard biosafety precautions.
- Made direct contact with the dead body of an Ebola patient without appropriate PPE.
- Lived with or shared a household with an Ebola patient in an outbreak affected country.

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For individuals who meet any of the high-risk criteria, a formal home quarantine order will be issued. This will ensure that the movements of all those who are potentially at high risk of developing Ebola are limited. These individuals can stay at home for the 21-day duration of the Ebola virus's incubation period.

Our Friday, October 24 guidance places health care workers returning from outbreak-affected areas and who used appropriate PPE with no known infection control breach in a “low risk” category, and specifically recommends “no quarantine, no travel restrictions and verified self monitoring.” (Verified self-monitoring means checking and reporting one’s temperature and other potential symptoms twice daily and reporting to local public health, by phone or other means.)

IDPH's guidance from Friday, October 24 is available at www.ebola.illinois.gov and includes a chart summarizing tiers of risk, airport procedures and local health department monitoring activities.

“It is critical that measures pertaining to returning travelers are rational and science-based,” Dr. Hasbrouck said. “We will not stigmatize health care workers, subject health care workers to undue restrictions or impair our ability to fight the epidemic at its source. The only way to reduce the risk of Ebola infections in the U.S. to zero is to extinguish the outbreak in West Africa. We gratefully acknowledge that U.S. health care workers are critical to that effort.

“We deeply respect and support the health care workers, hospitals and local health departments who are working together to address Ebola worldwide. Science-based efforts to protect the public and ensure the safety of health care workers are foremost in our minds as we forge ahead to prepare and manage any future public health challenge in Illinois.”

For questions about Ebola, call the hotline at 800-889-3931.

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