New or Modified Protocols for Ebola

Charlotte-Douglas International Airport Response

The Mecklenburg County Health Department (MCHD) will continue to collaborate with the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) when an illness of public health concern occurs at the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport. For international flights, the CDC has jurisdiction over the passengers on the aircraft. For domestic flights, the NC Division of Public Health has jurisdiction over passengers on the aircraft. According to state law, the Mecklenburg County Human Services Agency Director has isolation and quarantine authority in Mecklenburg County, and will make decisions to hold or release ill passengers, airline crew, and/or passengers based on recommendations from the MCHD Health Director. If it is anticipated that passengers will be held for long periods, they will be deplaned and moved to a location specified by the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport Operations. NC DHHS and the CDC will be notified of decisions and disposition of the passengers when contact is made. Persons with recent travel to Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone are being identified as they enter the United States at the five major airports (New York, Newark, Chicago, Washington, and Atlanta).

After Hours/Emergency Contact and Communications

During an Ebola emergency, emergency calls will be answered by MCHD Communicable Disease nurses. This will allow the immediate access to a MCHD communicable disease professional by hospitals, urgent cares, MEDIC, Charlotte Fire Department, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD), Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Management, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Mecklenburg County Sherriff’s Office, Mecklenburg County Public Information, and other government and non-government organizations. Communicable Disease nurses will continue to rotate “on-call” duty on a weekly basis.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS)

CMS will communicate with students and parents regarding measures to prevent infectious disease in general and Ebola in particular. Hand washing and staying at home when ill are a few examples of the messages that will be crafted and disseminated. In addition, the practice of infectious disease prevention measures will be emphasized on all CMS campuses. The link between schools and MCHD via the on-site MCHD School Nurse remains important. The School Nurse will contact MCHD Communicable Disease staff should a concern arise related to Ebola.

To prepare for possible changes in the current Ebola situation (e.g., Ebola case occurs in Mecklenburg or as directed by the CDC or NC DHHS), CMS will develop plans to screen for possible Ebola in the student population (health assessments and travel/exposure questionnaires), clean-up and disinfect school property, protect their staff and students who are not ill, ensure transport of suspect ill patients, and
report suspected ill patients and/or Ebola contacts to the MCHD. These measures will be implemented as needed.

**Surveillance of Persons with Positive Travel History and Uncertain Exposure Risk, and Contact Tracing**

MCHD Communicable Disease staff will conduct surveillance of individuals suspected of having exposure to the Ebola virus. These individuals include anyone who has traveled to one of the three countries experiencing widespread Ebola transmission or who has been in close contact with someone who has or had Ebola or who has or had come in contact with the body fluids of such an individual. The extent of follow-up will vary with the degree of risk of exposure to the virus. These individuals are being identified as they enter the United States at the five major airports (New York, Newark, Chicago, Washington, and Atlanta).

Rapid identification of someone exhibiting Ebola-like symptoms would lead to immediate transport to a health-care facility and implementation of measures to minimize spread of the virus to others. Communicable Disease nurses will identify anyone who may have been in contact with the individual or his or her body fluids (contract tracing). Should the number of contacts increase substantially, additional personnel from other programs within the Health Department would participate in this the contact tracing effort.

**Quarantine and Isolation**

The Mecklenburg County Health Department will expedite the process of issuing and enforcing quarantine and isolation orders. This protocol will insure rapid access to the Mecklenburg County Human Services Director on a 24/7 basis by using after hours/emergency contact procedures, approval of the issuance of verbal orders to individuals suspected of having Ebola, and development of Ebola-specific quarantine and isolation order templates. When an individual refuses to comply with a quarantine or isolation order, the Health Department will immediately seek an arrest warrant, which can be issued by a Magistrate on a 24/7 basis. In addition, when an individual has Ebola or Ebola-like symptoms and ignores a health-care provider’s instructions regarding isolation, the Health Department may seek an arrest warrant without first issuing an isolation order to the individual. The Health Department will work with law enforcement to ensure that arrests are carried out safely and expeditiously. The Health Department will ensure that all parties involved (hospitals, MEDIC, CMPD, Sheriff’s Department, and the judiciary) have thorough knowledge of the process.

**Communication with Liberian, Guinean and Sierra Leonean Communities**

The Health Department has established communication with the Liberian community in Mecklenburg County, which is in close association with the local Guinean and Sierra Leonean communities. Discussions have included training by the Health Department for natural leaders in the community about Ebola, so that factual information can be shared with entire community in houses of worship and social gatherings, as well as with friends and family members living in West Africa. We also plan to work collaboratively to help eliminate any stigma that may develop against the communities in Mecklenburg County because of the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone.