

Keeping Ontario Safe from Ebola Virus Disease

October 17, 2014

At the outset of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, Ontario's health care system began to heighten its readiness to diagnose, contain, and treat the disease to protect the people of Ontario.

Now that Ebola has reached North America, it is critical to continuously update the province's readiness strategies as new information becomes available. These enhancements will help provide enhanced protection for the public and for health care workers who are on the front lines of both containing and treating Ebola.

The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care is asking the Interim Chief Medical Officer of Health to issue a directive to health care employers regarding both personal protection equipment and protocols that are required to ensure that front-line health care workers are protected.

This directive provides instructions to all acute care settings—in particular, to their management and employees—concerning procedures necessary to protect the health of workers and significantly reduce the risk of spreading the disease.

The directive also requires that two nurses provide care to each confirmed case at all times, along with the stipulation that they must not care for any other patients. In addition, qualified and trained management personnel must be designated to supervise the safety of health care workers.

The ministry is also enhancing its readiness strategies in six additional ways:

1. The ministry has designated ten hospitals across Ontario to serve as referral hospitals to treat Ebola cases. They are: Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, Hamilton Health Sciences, Health Sciences North, Hospital for Sick Children, Kingston General Hospital, London Health Sciences Centre, The Ottawa Hospital, St. Michael's Hospital, Sunnybrook Hospital and University Health Network's Toronto Western Hospital. These hospitals have sophisticated infection control systems and procedures in place that are designed to limit the spread of infection, protect health care workers and provide the best care possible for the patient.
2. The ministry is working with ORNGE and other Emergency Medical Services providers to designate and equip ambulances to transport patients with Ebola to the designated referral hospitals for treatment. The first responders on these ambulances would wear appropriate personal protection equipment such as bio hazard suits and transport patients in an isolation bubble to protect themselves.
3. Starting on Monday October 20, 2014, the Public Health Ontario Laboratory in Toronto will have the capability to conduct Ebola testing. This will provide Ontario with local

capacity that will make test results available sooner. The specimens will also be sent to the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg for parallel testing and confirmation of both negative and positive results.

4. The ministry is creating a formal Minister's Advisory Table on Ebola Preparedness to ensure that the needs of health care workers are addressed as quickly as possible, and that ongoing advice is provided to the Minister. It will include frontline workers and health care providers.
5. The ministry is creating an Ebola Command Table, which will be chaired by the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care and will include, the Interim Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Deputy Minister, Public Health Ontario, the Ministry of Labour and other partner ministries, and representatives of the province's LHINs and designated referral hospitals. The groups will meet regularly to provide advice on updates to the province's procedures for containing and treating infectious disease.
6. The province is enhancing the availability of personal protective equipment such as bio hazard suits and N95 protective respirators to further protect health care workers who treat Ebola patients. This is in addition to existing personal protection equipment that is already stockpiled by hospitals and includes such enhanced protection as face shields, hoods and boots.

These measures were developed with guidance from specialists in workplace health and safety in a health care setting.

In collaboration with health system partners, the ministry continues to monitor the Ebola situation to assess the risk to Ontarians and to ensure that our system remains prepared.

Guidelines and other direction will be updated as necessary to keep the Ontario public and the health care system informed.

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