

 URL: <http://tbo.com/health/medical-news/ebola-leaves-mark-in-local-hospital-procedures-20141112/>

Florida hospitals prepare in case of Ebola patient

By [Keith Morelli](#)



Workers train putting on and removing the personal protective equipment providers would use if a patient with Ebola received treatment at Tampa General Hospital. TAMPA GENERAL HOSPITAL

TAMPA — The public frenzy has abated for now across the U.S. but the Ebola crisis in West Africa leaves its mark in the way local hospitals conduct business, determined as they are to spot that one person who might walk through the door showing symptoms of the deadly disease.

No cases have been reported in the state, though false rumors, attributed more to fear than facts, abounded in October about cases in the Tampa Bay area.

“There is not an Ebola crisis in the U.S. — there is Ebola hysteria,” said Daniel Van Durme, a Florida State University College of Medicine professor and director of its Center on Global Health.

Van Durme and others spoke Wednesday night in Tallahassee on the virus' appearance in America.

He reminded the audience that to get you sick, Ebola “has to get in you, not just on you” but also cautioned that could mean “that little paper cut you didn't know you had.”

As little as 10 virus particles can cause infection, and Ebola can survive on surfaces for several hours, though a household-bleach-and-water solution will kill it.

As of Wednesday, there were still no confirmed cases of Ebola infection in Florida, said Claudia Blackburn, administrator for the Florida Department of Health in Leon County.

There are, however, six people being “monitored” for the virus in the state, she added. The monitoring lasts for three weeks, the incubation period of the virus.

Those under suspicion must have been in affected countries in Africa and have to have had contact with other infected people.

❖ ❖ ❖

Locally, hospitals are taking advice from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), hoping not to be taken by surprise by an incoming patient. Some are grabbing the attention of visitors with prominent lobby signs urging them to come clean or even walk away if they've visited countries where Ebola is present.

“We're using questionnaires at all points of entry,” said John Dunn, spokesman for [Tampa General Hospital](#). “We're asking about travel to affected countries and we're using a map to help with that.”

“We didn't put signs up. We're just asking the questions and then if there exhibiting any of the symptoms, we put them in isolation.”

So far, he said, no cases.

Tampa General, on Davis Islands near the heart of downtown Tampa, has stocked up on protective gear for staff should an Ebola patient show up at the emergency room door.

“We're doing training with our nurses too,” Dunn said. “We've got about 66 people trained. We've developed rapid response teams and we're conducting some surprise drills.”

The [Florida Shriners Hospitals for Children-Tampa](#) has posted signs in the lobby urging people who may have Ebola symptoms or who recently traveled to West Africa to leave the hospital for the protection of health-care workers, visitors and young patients.

“We always want to take proactive and cautious approaches with our patients and families and staff,” said Beth Demas, Shriners spokeswoman. “We are following the recommendations of the Florida Hospital Association and the CDC.”

She said the hospital, on the University of South Florida campus, doesn't have an emergency room.

“We're different from other hospitals,” she said. “We're a small hospital. We always want to take precautions. We treat children; everybody who comes into our hospital is precious to us.”

“We want to make sure we are staying current. Our staff, of course, is being very cautious.”



The CDC has issued guidelines, in the form of an Ebola preparedness checklist, for hospitals and health-care centers to guard against the spread of the disease that has claimed more than 5,000 lives in West Africa.

“Every hospital should ensure that it can detect a patient with Ebola, protect health-care workers so they can safely care for the patient, and respond in a coordinated fashion,” the document said.

Among the suggestions are emergency-room screening criteria that includes relevant questions about possible exposure to Ebola, including travel within 21 days from an affected West African country.

To prevent any spread of the disease from an infected person, both the CDC and the Florida Hospital Association are trying to get in front of the situation.

“We recommend that patients be screened at the entrance to emergency departments for these risk factors: travel or exposure history and the symptoms,” said Arjun Srinivasan, associate director of Health Care Associated Infection Prevention Programs with the CDC, in a conference call with health-care providers Oct. 31.

“If they do have both have both of those criteria,” he said, “we recommend that the patients immediately be

isolated, be placed in a private room, (with) staff entering the room and wearing protective equipment ... ”

According to the [Florida Hospital Association](#), 116 requests have been submitted to assess people with Ebola symptoms in the state since March 15. None have tested positive.

“Florida has not received any new requests to assess symptomatic persons who reported travel to an outbreak country during a time that the country was under observation for Ebola transmission,” said an association advisory issued last week.

As of last Wednesday, there have been 19 airline passengers reported by the CDC Quarantine Branch to have Florida destinations and 13 of these passengers are currently being monitored in Florida, the advisory said.



One hospital in Tampa where patients come from far flung places is the [James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital](#), which offers treatment to veterans returning from war-torn areas including Afghanistan and the Middle East.

The veterans' hospital, located in north Tampa, also has taken steps to guard against the spread of Ebola or other diseases among its patients, visitors and staff.

Though she wouldn't be specific, Karen Collins, spokeswoman for the hospital, confirmed the policy changes Tuesday afternoon.

“We have a whole new policy that we have developed,” she said, “which addresses Ebola and any other potential infectious disease.”

[Florida Hospital](#), which operates a handful of health-care centers in West Central Florida — including Tampa, Carrollwood, Wesley Chapel and Zephyrhills — also has posted signs, said Jennifer McVan, director of media relations.

“At some of our hospitals we've posted signs in the main entrance areas and the emergency rooms,” she said.

The signs are up at the suggestion of the CDC, she said.

“We have developed specific protocols to screen, identify and isolate suspected patients with Ebola should they come into one of our facilities,” said a Florida Hospital statement issued recently. “We will continue to provide additional training and education to our staff. Our ultimate priority is to provide the best possible care for any patient impacted by Ebola while protecting Florida Hospital patients, staff, visitors and the community.”

BayCare Health System, which operates the [St. Joseph's hospitals](#), has posters up around some of its centers urging patients to tell health-care providers if they have been to the three nations suffering from the crisis — Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone — within the past 30 days, said St. Joseph's spokeswoman Nancy Gay.

“They're posted in the patient-intake areas, the emergency room and we have flyers at the front desk,” Gay said. “Admission forms also ask about international travel and exposure.”

Tribune/Scripps Capital Bureau reporter James L. Rosica contributed to this report.

kmorelli@tampatrib.com

(813) 259-7760