

Detect, protect, and respond: Preventing the further spread of Ebola

Below is a letter from AAFP President Reid Blackwelder, MD, FAAFP

Dear Colleague,

As family physicians, we are on the frontline—dealing with any health crisis that faces our patients and our nation. As fears about Ebola rise in the United States, we want you to be informed and ready to respond, whether to answer patients' questions or to detect an infected patient.

You can prevent further spread of this disease by being ready to detect a potential patient, protect yourself and others from exposure, and respond with appropriate patient care.

Detect: Ask all patients with nonspecific signs and symptoms about recent travel or other potential contact.

A travel history should be taken as early as possible with all patients. This is a good practice even when Ebola is not suspected. Also consider other potential sources of exposure, such as work-related contact. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) maintain a [webpage that lists the countries where patients have tested positive](#) for Ebola.

The signs and symptoms of Ebola are nonspecific, and include fever, headache, muscle weakness, vomiting, and diarrhea. However, Ebola can be nearly eliminated from the differential by ruling out travel to the affected area or high-risk contact (e.g. caring for a person with Ebola).

Protect: Use good infection control practices.

Ebola is spread through direct contact with the bodily fluids of a person or animal infected with the virus. It is not airborne. As with other communicable diseases, frequent hand washing is critical. Surfaces and equipment should be properly decontaminated. For instructions on infection control, follow the [CDC's guidance on environmental infection control](#) in hospitals.

Personnel who come in contact with the patient should use the recommended Personal Protective Equipment. Be sure to follow the [proper sequence for putting on and removing Personal Protective Equipment](#).

Currently, there is no vaccine against the Ebola virus, but we can protect our patients from other communicable diseases by ensuring that they have received all other recommended immunizations.

Respond: Have a plan.

If you encounter a suspected Ebola patient, notify the appropriate agencies immediately. Ebola is a nationally notifiable disease. It must be reported to

local, state, and public health authorities, as well as the CDC. The CDC maintains [health department contact information for each state](#) on its website.

The [CDC website](#) has many resources for physicians and other health care workers. The CDC's main emergency operations center may also be reached at eocreport@cdc.gov, or by calling (770) 488-7100. The emergency operations center is staffed 24 hours a day.

The AAFP is closely monitoring the Ebola threat. Information is available on www.aafp.org/ebola to help in this effort. We are confident in our collective ability to control the domestic spread of Ebola.

Thank you for your dedication to your patients, staff, and communities.

Sincerely,

Reid Blackwelder, MD, FAAFP

AAFP President

Helpful links

[Centers for Disease Control: Ebola resources](#)

[Kansas Department of Health & Environment: Ebola resources](#)

[Information for Public Health & Medical Professionals in U.S.](#)

[Ebola Preparedness for the U.S. Healthcare System \(webinar\)](#)