Ebola

Beginning in March 2014, West Africa experienced the largest outbreak of Ebola in history, with multiple countries affected. On December 29, 2015, the World Health Organization declared the end of Ebola virus transmission in the Republic of Guinea, marking an important milestone in the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa. All three of the West African nations impacted by the outbreak now have Ebola under control. There were a total of 28,601 cases and 11,300 deaths.

During the Ebola outbreak, communities worldwide initiated steps to minimize the risk of local transmission of the disease. Travelers from Ebola-endemic countries were interviewed at airports upon their departure from those countries. When the travelers arrived in the United States, they were monitored for a period of 21 days. In Santa Barbara County, we monitored a total of 16 travelers from any one of the Ebola-endemic countries.

In addition to monitoring travelers, Santa Barbara County prepared Emergency Medical Services and healthcare providers to screen for potential Ebola exposure. We planned and practiced with our local hospitals how to provide safe and protective care for potential Ebola patients. Our local laboratories initiated procedures to assure safe and secure methods to obtain and test specimens. We developed protocols for activities ranging from an initial contact through the safe disposal of personal items. In November of 2014, the Public Health Department and many of our community healthcare partners participated in a disaster drill simulating an Ebola suspect.

We are very fortunate that we did not have a confirmed Ebola case in Santa Barbara County. The steps that were initiated for this particular Ebola outbreak will be beneficial for other potential communicable diseases. As a community, we are now more prepared to keep our residents healthy and safe from the transmission of any communicable disease.

The Health Officer, Dr. Charity Dean, does emphasize the importance of healthcare providers continuing to perform a general travel history for all patients, given the ongoing communicable disease outbreaks across the globe. For up to date information on travelers’ health, please see www.cdc.gov/travel

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