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Governor Bullock Announces New Protocols for Montanans Returning from Ebola-Affected Regions; Command Team to Ensure State Preparedness

Helena, Mont. – Governor Steve Bullock today announced the adoption of new state health agency protocols for Montanans who have returned from the Ebola-affected regions in Western Africa, or who may have come in contact with a person infected with the virus.

“These new protocols will help ensure the safety of those potentially exposed to Ebola, and the safety of Montanans as a whole,” said Bullock.

The state is informed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the names of all passengers who return to Montana from Ebola-affected regions in Western Africa or who have had contact with an Ebola-infected individual. Once the state is notified, the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services coordinates with local public health departments to ensure all returning travelers receive daily monitoring.

Individuals who had known exposure to the virus will require direct active monitoring by public health officials, including a twice-daily review of symptoms and observation of the individual checking their temperature. Monitoring also includes discussion of plans to work, travel or go to public places and determining whether these activities are permitted.

While these protocols are the current best practices, as new information is received, the protocols will evolve to reflect a better understanding of how to most effectively treat and monitor individuals who may have been exposed.

“With national media attention on this disease, it is understandable that Montanans are concerned about the spread of Ebola,” Dick Brown, President/CEO of MHA (formerly the Montana Hospital Association). “However, with the talented and trained public health officials and hospital staff in this state, along with Governor Bullock’s protocols for monitoring those at highest risk, residents should rest easy knowing that Montana is taking proactive steps to prevent this virus in the state.”

“With a disease like Ebola, it is important that the public has confidence that health officials have a rigorous plan to preventing the spread of the disease if it enters the state,” Melanie Reynolds, Lewis & Clark County Health Officer. “These protocols will ensure that those at highest-risk of contracting the virus are quickly identified and if necessary, treatment is effectively administered to eliminate the risk of further infections.”

“Montana Nurses Association (MNA) working with our national affiliate American Nurses Association (ANA) support these protocols as they provide important guidance based on the best available scientific evidence and provide essential information to health care professionals as well as Montanans returning from affected regions,” said Vicky Byrd, Executive Director of the Montana Nurses Association. “These protocols provide the guidelines appropriately monitor individuals who may have been exposed to or have had direct contact with a symptomatic person diagnosed with Ebola. This guidance clarifies the appropriate limitation to travel and presence in public places based on the level of risk that individual poses to the public. These protocols also take into account the rural nature of our state, and provide appropriate steps for accommodating those who live a great distance from their nearest hospital or health facility.”

In addition to the new protocols, earlier this month, Bullock put in place a Command Team to coordinate Ebola- preparedness activities in the state. The team – led by Major General Matt Quinn who oversees emergency preparedness for the state – bolsters Montana’s strong public health infrastructure and health care delivery system that serves as a strong foundation for these preparedness activities.

Along with experts from DPHHS in public health and communicable disease, members of the team include:

- Maj. Gen. Matt Quinn – Adjutant General, Montana National Guard;
- Richard Opper – Director, Department of Public Health and Human Services;
- Brad Livingston – Administrator, Disaster and Emergency Services;
- Tracy Stone-Manning – Director, Montana Department of Environmental Quality;
- Mike Tooley - Director, Montana Department of Transportation; and
- Jason Smith – Director, Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs.

“I’ve tasked these experts with creating, and now maintaining, a reasonable and effective approach to Ebola preparedness in Montana. I have every confidence that this team will do everything possible to ensure Montana is prepared in the unlikely event that a case of Ebola appears in Montana,” said Bullock.

The Command Team has been charged with maintaining an Ebola-specific incident response plan, ensuring ongoing coordination of inter-agency and inter-governmental activities, and providing ongoing briefings to the Governor and other officials on preparedness activities.

For more information on the new monitoring protocols, go to www.dphhs.mt.gov and click on the Ebola link, or contact your local public health department.

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