

Readying the Responders – Infection Control Training for US Clinicians Bound for West Africa

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Summary: When Ebola cases began to surge in West Africa, it was clear that more doctors were needed to help. Get a look inside CDC's rigorous 3-day training course in protective gear for clinicians volunteering to treat Ebola patients in West Africa.

Abstract:

Background: The 2014 Ebola epidemic in West Africa overwhelmed local healthcare infrastructure and created an urgent need for international clinicians to treat patients in Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs). Because no US-based training existed, we developed a 3-day course to train clinicians responding to the outbreak how to work safely in African ETUs.

Methods: CDC developed the course in 29 days with WHO and Médecins Sans Frontières personnel who had experience working in ETUs. The weekly course included lectures, table-top exercises, and exercises wherein participants simulated patient-care activities while wearing personal protective equipment in a mock ETU. For sustainability, early trainees included future course trainers as well as persons deploying immediately.

Results: Between September 22 and November 19, 2014, we received >700 trainee applications; 249 students were trained in eight course sessions, including participants from 27 non-governmental organizations (n=115), the US Public Health Service (n=83), the US military (n=9), and CDC (n=10). Among 160 participants reporting deployment to West Africa, none are known to have acquired Ebola virus disease (EVD). Ninety-eight different instructors taught at eight course sessions; each required approximately 20 instructors. Course graduates working in ETUs reported being well-prepared after training; 85% of students agreed that training objectives for course sections were fully met. Training is scheduled to continue into 2015.

Conclusions: Reducing community transmission by isolating EVD patients and providing care in ETUs is an important component of the public health response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. The CDC Ebola Safety Training Course has increased the number of clinicians who can provide care in African ETUs and serves as a model for prompt, focused training in response to public health emergencies.