Beat: Health

Texas nurse tests positive for Ebola after treating first patient

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USPA News - A Texas nurse has tested positive for Ebola after an apparent breach in protocol earlier this month while treating a Liberian man who later died of the same disease, U.S. officials confirmed on Sunday, marking the first spread of Ebola inside the United States. The nurse, whose name or age were not immediately released, had been self-monitoring for fever and other Ebola-symptoms since being involved in the treatment of Thomas Eric Duncan, the Liberian man who died of Ebola at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas on Wednesday morning.

Carrie Williams, a spokesperson for the Texas Department of State Health Services, said the nurse reported a low-grade fever on Friday night, after which she went to the hospital and was immediately placed in isolation. A preliminary blood test came back positive for Ebola on Saturday night, and the diagnosis was confirmed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Sunday afternoon. Wendell Watson, a spokesman for Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas, said the nurse remained in a stable condition on Sunday. He said a close contact of the woman was also placed in isolation. "We knew a second case could be a reality, and we`ve been preparing for this possibility. We are broadening our team in Dallas and working with extreme diligence to prevent further spread," said Dr. David Lakey, commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services. The CDC said the Ebola infection is believed to have occurred as a result of a breach in infection control protocols during the treatment of Duncan, which began on September 28. Additional CDC officers have been dispatched to Dallas to work with state and local authorities to review infection control procedures and the use of protective equipment. The White House said President Barack Obama had been briefed on the second case, after which he spoke by telephone with Health Secretary Sylvia Burwell and directed federal authorities to take immediate additional steps to ensure hospitals and healthcare providers across the country are prepared to follow protocols for Ebola. "The President during the conversation directed that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention`s investigation into the apparent breach in infection control protocols at the Dallas hospital move as expeditiously as possible," the White House said. "Lessons learned from that inquiry are [directed to be] shared quickly and broadly." Officials said "careful monitoring" was warranted for all workers who had contact with Duncan but downplayed the risk of further spreading. "The CDC and the Texas Department of State Health Services remain confident that wider spread in the community can be prevented with proper public health measures, including ongoing contact tracing, health monitoring among those known to have been in contact with the index patient, and immediate isolations if symptoms develop," a CDC statement said. Duncan, the first person to be diagnosed with Ebola outside of Africa, tested positive for the virus on September 30. He had left Liberia on September 19 and arrived in Dallas the next day after taking flights that took him to Brussels and the Washington, D.C. area. He fell ill four days later and sought medical care on September 26, only to be turned away before being hospitalized on September 28 after developing symptoms consistent with Ebola. Several people who were in close contact with Duncan while he was ill remain in quarantine, although there is no indication that any of them have contracted the virus. Authorities have also ruled out any risk to passengers who traveled on the same flights as Duncan because Ebola victims are only contagious when they are experiencing active symptoms. The Ebola outbreak in West Africa is believed to have started in Guinea in December 2013 but was not detected until March, after which it spread to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. The current outbreak features the Zaire strain of the Ebola virus, which is considered to be the most aggressive and deadly strain, having killed up to 9 out of 10 infected in previous outbreaks. As of October 8, at least 8,399 people have been infected with Ebola since the outbreak began, including 4,033 people who have died of the disease, according to health authorities in the countries involved. Liberia has been the worst hit country with at least 4,076 cases including 2,316 deaths, but authorities believe the actual figures are far higher. Ebola is a highly infectious disease and kills its victims in a very short time. Signs and symptoms include high grade fever, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, headache, measles-like rash, red eyes and, in some cases, bleeding from body openings. The ongoing outbreak is the worst ever of its kind and coincides with an unrelated Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The virus, for which there is no cure or vaccine, can spread through direct contact with body fluids such as saliva, blood, stool, vomit, urine and sweat but also through soiled linen used by an infected person. It can also spread by using skin piercing instruments previously used by an infected person or by touching the body of a person who died of Ebola. It is not airborne. In a statement earlier this week, the World Health Organization (WHO) attempted to quell fears that Ebola can spread through coughing or sneezing, which has never been proven. "Speculation that Ebola virus disease might mutate into a form that could easily spread among humans through the air is just that: speculation, unsubstantiated by any evidence," the WHO said. The first outbreak of Ebola in 1976 in Zaire - which is now the Democratic Republic of Congo - had been the deadliest until the current outbreak, killing at least 280 people and sickening 38 others, putting the fatality rate at 88 percent. The Ebola outbreak in Uganda in 2000 had long been the largest ever recorded, killing 224 people and sickening at least 201 others.

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