To: Ohio Schools
From: Ohio Department of Education
Date: October 16, 2014
Re: Ebola and other infectious diseases

With news that a Dallas healthcare worker who contracted the Ebola virus had recently travelled to Northeast Ohio, you may be curious about what efforts are being taken to address the issue.

While it may be the first time most of the public has thought about Ebola and Ohio, the Ohio Department of Health has been working since summer to make sure those on the frontlines—local doctors, EMS, hospitals and local health departments—have the information and resources they need. In fact, on Tuesday, October 14, officials from the Ohio Department of Health conducted a preparedness seminar and a tabletop exercise with healthcare partners representing hospitals, physicians, nurses, EMS responders and local health departments to test the response to a hypothetical positive case.

Ebola is a rare and deadly disease caused by infection with one of the Ebola virus strains. Ebola can cause disease in humans and nonhuman primates (monkeys, gorillas, and chimpanzees).

- Ebola is spread by touching the blood and body fluids of a person who is sick with Ebola, or items with their blood and body fluids on it like clothes and bedding. Ebola is not spread through the air, food or water.
- Patients are contagious only when they are symptomatic and show signs of a fever.
- Anyone believing that they have been in contact with a person with Ebola should call their health care provider.

To learn more about Ebola, you can visit the Ohio Department of Health’s dedicated website or refer to their fact sheet. We have also attached some talking points you may find useful.

While Ebola is in the headlines, we as educators should strive to be prepared to deal with infectious diseases throughout the school year. That is why we strongly encourage each school to review its infection control policies and procedures with teachers and staff. And please take every opportunity to reinforce healthy germ-stopping habits with students.

Good information on preventing the flu and other infectious diseases can be found on the Ohio Department of Health website.
What You Need to Know about Ebola

The 2014 Ebola epidemic is the largest in history

While Ebola does not pose an imminent risk to Ohio residents, out of an abundance of caution the Ohio Department of Health is working with local health departments, hospitals, EMS responders, physicians, other health care professionals and state agencies to be prepared.

The first U.S. Ebola case (a traveler from West Africa) was diagnosed in Dallas, Texas on September 30.

Facts about Ebola in the U.S.

You can’t get Ebola through air

You can’t get Ebola through water

You can’t get Ebola through food

A person infected with Ebola can’t spread the disease until symptoms appear

The time from exposure to when signs or symptoms of the disease appear (the incubation period) is 2 to 21 days, but the average time is 8 to 10 days. Signs of Ebola include fever (higher than 100.4 F) and symptoms like severe headache, muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, unexplained bleeding or bruising.

Ebola is spread through direct contact with blood and body fluids

Ebola is spread through direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with:

- Blood and body fluids (like urine, feces, saliva, vomit, sweat and semen) of a person who is sick with Ebola.
- Objects (like needles) that have been contaminated with the blood or body fluids of a person sick with Ebola.

Ebola is not spread through the air, water, or food but can remain in contaminated clothing, bedding, towels, etc.

If you recently traveled to West Africa or had close contact with a person sick with Ebola, you may be at risk if you

- Had direct contact with blood or body fluids or items that came into contact with blood or body fluids from a person with Ebola.
- Touched bats or non human primates or blood, fluids, or raw meat prepared from these animals.
- Went into hospitals where Ebola patients were being treated and had close contact with patients.
- Touched the body of a person who died of Ebola.

What you should do

- Watch for signs and symptoms of Ebola for 21 days.
- Take your temperature every morning and evening to see if you develop a fever.
- Watch for other Ebola symptoms, like severe headache, muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain, unexplained bleeding or bruising.
- Call your doctor even if you do not have symptoms. The doctor can evaluate your exposure level and any symptoms and consult with public health authorities to determine if actions are needed.
- Call first before you go to the hospital or your doctor. Calling first will help them take care of you and protect other people.

For more information

Call your local health department
24-hour Call Center: 1-866-800-1404
Visit the Ohio Department of Health website at www.odh.ohio.gov