

Australian Health Protection Principal Committee

STATEMENT

15 August 2014

Australia is well prepared to deal with Ebola

Health authorities are well placed to manage the unlikely possibility of a person with Ebola Virus Disease arriving in Australia.

Following a series of teleconferences and discussions in recent weeks, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) met in Sydney on 13 and 14 August to discuss the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and to review current and specific local and national response arrangements.

The AHPPC is Australia's leading health protection advisory committee. It is chaired by the Australian Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Baggoley, and its membership includes the Chief Health Officers of all Australian States and Territories, as well as Australian communicable disease, emergency management and pathology experts.

While there are no cases of Ebola in Australia and the risk of an outbreak in Australia remains very low, comprehensive plans and arrangements exist in all Australian States and Territories for the public health response to the introduction of exotic infectious diseases, including Ebola.

Chief Health Officers in all States and Territories stated that specific guidance has been issued to their hospitals, paramedic and ambulance workforce, general practitioners and state-based quarantine and medical staff.

In addition, the Australian Government has in place additional measures to address the low risk of Ebola entering Australia. These measures are consistent with the World Health Organization's recommendations for all countries.

These measures include:

The placing of Ebola-specific banners and information pamphlets at major Australian international airports to raise awareness about the symptoms of Ebola

- All Australian airport border agencies have been provided with Ebola guidance by the Australian Government Department of Health to identify and quarantine any passengers presenting with Ebola symptoms in flights or at airports
- The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service has measures in place to assist with the identification of passengers who may be arriving into Australia from affected countries

- The health of people who have originated their travel from affected countries in West Africa will be checked.

The AHPPC meeting agreed that specific preparedness measures undertaken to date, together with the high-level of general public awareness, were appropriate for the level of risk to Australia.

Australian health authorities will continue to regularly communicate on this issue, closely monitor the situation overseas and assess the adequacy of our response measures.

AHPPC Chair, Professor Chris Baggoley, repeated the message that while Ebola is a very serious disease, it is not highly contagious. Ebola is not influenza. It is not spread through coughing or sneezing. It is only transmitted through contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person or animal.

“Australian health authorities are well practised in dealing with new infectious diseases, as was demonstrated in recent years with the national responses to SARS and Pandemic Influenza, and we are confident that adequate measures are in place to deal with any threat,” Prof Baggoley said.

Specific information about Ebola for Australian travellers and the general public, as well as for general practitioners, clinicians and laboratories, is available on the Australian Government Department of Health website at: www.health.gov.au/ebola

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