

Halton Healthcare Services taking precautions in wake of Ebola

By **RACHAEL WILLIAMS**
Metroland Media Group

With recent reports of the deadly Ebola disease inching closer to Canada, Halton Healthcare Services (HHS) is taking precautions to prevent the spread of infection.

HHS confirmed that news of the fatal disease reaching the United States last week has put healthcare providers on high alert. The Public Health Agency of Canada has requested heightened surveillance for patients who have recently travelled to the affected western African countries. Necessary protocols, including isolation, testing and control practices have been in place since July.

"All Canadian hospitals are on high alert for patients with signs and symptoms of Ebola whose travel history includes the affected African countries within the past 21 days of the onset of their symptoms," said Dr. Neil Rau, HHS infectious diseases specialist.

According to the World Health Organization's website, the virus is concentrated in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The heightened precautions are the result of a recent diagnosis of Ebola in Dallas, Texas.

Thomas Eric Duncan, a 42-year-old resident of Liberia, was diagnosed on September 30 after coming in contact with the virus in Africa and then hopping on a plane to the

U.S. to visit family. Duncan died yesterday.

Recent reports from a number of American news outlets say roughly 100 people in Dallas had been in contact with Duncan, and about a handful are being monitored.

In the case of an incident reported in Halton, Rau said "any suspected patient is immediately isolated, the proper protocols are put in place for specimen testing and the proper health authorities including the Public Health Agency of Canada would be notified."

The WHO's most updated figures say that the disease has killed 3,338 people, with 7,178 reported incidents. One-week prior, these numbers were 3,091 and 6,574, respectively.

Rau confirmed that there were no cases of Ebola in Canada and that the risk of importation remained low.

The virus is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads in the human population through human-to-human transmission. Symptoms include fever, fatigue, muscle pain, headache sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, symptoms of impaired kidney and liver function and in some cases, internal and external bleeding. Once infected, symptoms take two to 21 days to appear.

There's presently no cure for the Ebola virus and the fatality rate is 50 per cent.

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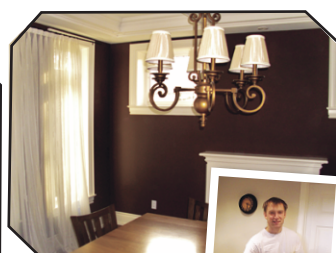
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