

18 December 2014

Neville Hudson
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Dear Neville

Request for Official Information (Reference H201404453)

Thank you for your request for official information, received by the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) on 25 November 2014. You raised concerns about the risk of Ebola entering our country when people return to New Zealand following deployment to West Africa and requested information regarding the measures in place to protect New Zealand.

This response contains information available on the Ministry website (<http://www.health.govt.nz/>). The Ministry's website is being updated as the international Ebola situation changes.

You questioned what additional measures have been put in place to ensure the maximum protection against Ebola and who has been identified as being at risk. No additional measures are required. New Zealand already has in place a protocol for people returning to New Zealand after assisting in the Ebola response in West Africa. This protocol includes a 21 day self-monitoring period, starting from the date of departure from an Ebola affected country. This protocol is available at the following link <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/ebola-updates/protocol-individuals-entering-new-zealand-after-assisting-ebola-response-affected-countries>.

In addition anyone arriving in New Zealand who in the last month has visited a West African country affected by the Ebola outbreak is screened at the border for symptoms of the disease, to assess their possible exposure to the Ebola virus and where necessary given a health assessment. Refer to the 'Screening of travellers at airports factsheet – 25 November 2014' for more information (<http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/ebola-updates/ebola-readiness>).

You also asked what protective equipment is available to protect those who may come in contact with those returning or their equipment. In the very unlikely event that there was a suspected case of Ebola in New Zealand, New Zealand health providers have isolation facilities and infection prevention and control protocols in place which are suitable for treating a suspected or confirmed case of Ebola (including appropriate personal protective equipment).

For more information, please refer to the 'updated information for health professionals: Ebola virus disease (EVD)' link on the Ministry website (<http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/ebola-updates/ebola-information-health-professionals>).

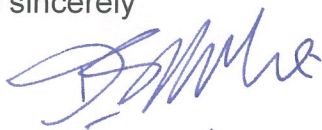
You asked what facilities are available close to the airport to house those returning. No facilities are required, as once a person is cleared following the border health assessment they are able to return home and undertake their usual daily activities whilst continuing to follow the protocol for individuals entering New Zealand after assisting in the Ebola response in affected countries (link provided above).

You also asked what makes us confident that we can contain Ebola better than the USA and those at the Ebola Source. In the USA, despite hundreds of people arriving to their borders from affected countries, only four people have been diagnosed in the USA. Two of these people had come from Ebola infected countries. One person was not diagnosed immediately and unfortunately infected two healthcare workers. Both healthcare workers recovered and did not infect anyone else. The second person, a returning healthcare worker, did not infect anyone else and also recovered. New Zealand receives around one person a month from an Ebola affected country. Please note this figure excludes people returning from deployment after assisting with the Ebola response who undertake health monitoring on their return as described above.

The Ministry is confident that we have the appropriate procedures in place to protect New Zealand while supporting the deployment of Volunteers to Sierra Leone to assist with the management of the Ebola outbreak. The Ministry continues to closely monitor the situation and the advice from the World Health Organization and other countries in relation to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

I trust this information fulfils your request. You have the right, under section 28 of the Act, to ask the Ombudsman to review my response to your request.

Yours sincerely



Dr Don Mackie
Chief Medical Officer
Clinical Leadership, Protection and Regulation