

# Central San Joaquin Valley hospitals guard against potential Ebola infections

By Barbara Anderson



Patients visiting the Kaweah Delta Medical Center in Visalia are met with this Ebola virus warning sign in the lobby of the emergency department. Central San Joaquin Valley hospitals say they are prepared for Ebola patients, if any arrive.

KAWEAH DELTA MEDICAL CENTER — Special to The Bee

No positive cases of Ebola virus have been identified in California, but central San Joaquin Valley hospitals are gearing up for the possibility.

At hospitals across the Valley, infection prevention managers are scanning emails, bulletins and faxes from county, state and federal officials for the latest guidance for identifying patients.

Visitors to hospitals are being met with signs and posters about Ebola virus: Anyone with a fever who has traveled to

West African countries or had contact with someone who has traveled there recently must tell emergency department staff immediately.

Saint Agnes Medical Center in northeast Fresno has sent staff to preparedness events and conferences -- the latest one on Thursday.

And on Friday, staff at Adventist Medical Center in Hanford held an Ebola drill. "It went very well and we're going to continue to do more of these," said Kathy Palusko, director of infection prevention and control for Adventist Health Central Valley Network.

But news this week that a Dallas hospital failed to admit a man who later tested positive for Ebola has cast doubt nationwide on hospitals' ability to handle patients.

California's two senators, Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, urged hospitals in the state Friday to make sure their staffs are fully trained to identify and treat Ebola patients.

The National Nurses United and California Nurses Association has said hospitals are ill-prepared for patients.

The nurses' union cites a recent survey of nurses in which 80% said their hospital had not communicated a policy about the potential admission of patients infected by Ebola and 87% said their hospital had not provided education on Ebola with nurses able to ask questions.

The National Nurses United survey also found more than 40% said their hospital has insufficient supplies -- face shields or side shields and goggles and fluid-resistant gowns for staff.

"We're concerned -- we're health-care workers, and we're going to be on the front line," Deborah Burger, president of National Nurses United, said Friday.

A hospital association representative said the alarm sounded by the nurses' union is unfounded.

"Hospitals are well trained, well prepared to deal with any type of infectious disease," said Jan Emerson-Shea, vice president of external affairs for the California Hospital Association. Before Ebola, there were the anthrax and smallpox scares after 9/11, and a few years ago there was SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome), Emerson-Shea said. "This is just the latest in a string of various infectious diseases that hospitals are prepared to deal with."

Valley hospital officials said they have enough masks, gowns, goggles and gloves for staff, and they're prepared for Ebola.

"Hospitals can receive patients with Ebola," said Melissa Janes, infection prevention manager at Kaweah Delta Health Care District in Visalia. "They do have the proper equipment. They do have rooms where patients can go."

But the Dallas case was a wake-up call.

According to news reports, the Dallas patient's travel history was not communicated from the nurse to the doctor on his first visit to the hospital because of an electronic records "workflow" problem. He was sent home with antibiotics, only to become more ill and return to the hospital a week later.

"I think everybody's learned from that lesson," Janes said.

A Kaiser Permanente-Fresno emergency department nurse said she doubts hospitals can be fully prepared. "We're going off basically on what we think we know about the virus," said Rhonda Sgro. "I don't know if we can be prepared for what kind of magnitude we could face."

Sgro said Kaiser is disseminating information about Ebola to emergency departments, but she remains concerned.

"Everything has to happen correctly, or any lapse of following protocol or procedures can be really detrimental to the community," she said. "It's an alarming thing."

A Kaiser official recently said the health system is prepared for Ebola. "We are confident in our preparedness plan, personal protective equipment and stringent attention to infection prevention measures, which follow the national standards set by the Centers for Disease Control," said Stephen M. Parodi, infectious disease specialist and director of hospital operations at Kaiser Permanente Northern California.

Hospitals have established protocols to identify Ebola patients and isolate any who are identified.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says health workers are instructed to inquire about a history of travel to West Africa in the 21 days before a patient reports fever or other symptoms consistent with Ebola. Symptoms can include fever, joint pains and aches and vomiting.

Patients with a travel history to an Ebola-affected country (currently Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea) and who have Ebola symptoms are to be placed in a private room with a private bathroom, and health workers are to take precautions and use gowns, face mask, eye protection and gloves.

Updates on Ebola are provided by county health departments, the state Department of Public Health and the CDC, said Raed Khoury, director of quality and patient safety at Children's Hospital Central California.

The county health department would be notified immediately if emergency department staff identified a potential Ebola patient, he said.

Hospitals in Fresno County have been given instructions on how to package and ship specimens to test for Ebola by a state lab in Los Angeles, said Joe Prado, community health manager at the county's Department of Public Health.

Fresno County's emergency responders also have been given instructions on taking steps to protect themselves and others.

"We handle patients occasionally who have communicable diseases and that's always a concern, and we have precautions and procedures in place," said Todd Valeri, president of American Ambulance.

Clinics, small hospitals and doctors' offices also have been contacted by the county and given information on how to identify Ebola and what to do if they have a potential patient.

"I'm pretty confident that everyone is aware of the issue, and I think that the threat" of Ebola is low, said Daniel Lynch, in charge of Emergency Medical Services in Fresno County.

### **What you should know about Ebola**

- Ebola virus is the cause of a viral hemorrhagic fever disease. Symptoms include: fever, headache, joint and muscle aches, weakness, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, lack of appetite and abnormal bleeding. Symptoms may appear anywhere from two to 21 days after exposure to the virus, but eight to 10 days is most common.
- Ebola is transmitted through direct contact with the blood or bodily fluids of an infected person who has symptoms or through exposure to objects (such as needles) that have been contaminated with infected secretions.
- Ebola is not a respiratory disease like the flu, so it is not transmitted through the air.
- Ebola is not transmitted through food in the United States. It is not transmitted through water.
- Individuals who have no symptoms are not contagious. In order for the virus to be transmitted, an individual would have to have direct contact with an individual who is experiencing symptoms or has died of the disease.

• More online: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Ebola page](#)

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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