

Intelligence Section

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Cobra Meeting called in UK regarding Ebola outbreak:

On the 08/10/14, the British Prime Minister David Cameron has called an emergency Cobra (Cabinet Office Briefing Room A) meeting at Whitehall, regarding Britain's response to the growing Ebola outbreak. Such meetings are only called in cases of emergencies which are of national significance, involving a committee of ministers, civil servants, the police and intelligence officers.

At the meeting, Britain will be examining how it is prepared for an Ebola outbreak, thought to be the third most likely country to import Ebola (American Universities research) and what more could be done to help prevent an outbreak. At present, the UK does not screen people entering from west African countries, although airports workers have been instructed on the signs and symptoms of a person who has contracted the Ebola virus. Proper screening could be implemented in the coming weeks. Another topic for discussion, is the amount of flights arriving from western Africa into the UK. (on average 40 per week – 6000 people) and this number may have to be reduced. Preparations are taking place to prepare four hospitals (London, Liverpool, Sheffield and Newcastle) for isolating potential patients with Ebola.

The virus is spreading in west Africa at an alarming rate (doubling each week – 5 people becoming infected every hour). Experts predict that Britain may see the first case of the virus by 24/10/14 but assures the public that they are well prepared and could contain an outbreak.

It is therefore extremely important that everyone involved in transporting goods and people around the world, are fully aware of the symptoms to look out for, to aid speedy diagnosis of any potential victims and know that a quick medical response will help treatment and containment of the deadly virus.

Symptoms of Ebola include

- Fever (greater than 38.6°C or 101.5°F)
- Severe headache
- Muscle pain
- Weakness
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal (stomach) pain
- Unexplained hemorrhage (bleeding or bruising)

Symptoms may appear anywhere from 2 to 21 days after exposure to Ebola, but the average is 8 to 10 days.

Recovery from Ebola depends on good supportive clinical care and the patient's immune response. People who recover from Ebola infection develop antibodies that last for at least 10 years.

Someone showing any of the above symptoms, who has recently travelled to west Africa, should seek medical advice immediately and present themselves at a hospital for testing. Vessels travelling to west Africa should expect to be screened and have longer waiting times before having permission to disembark and embark their vessels. Protective equipment, such as gloves and masks should be used when going ashore.

Three global shipping organisations issued guidance to their members on the risks posed to ships' crews calling in countries affected by the Ebola virus. The ICS (International Chamber of Shipping), IMEC (International Maritime Employers' Council), and the ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation) urgently advise that on all such vessels:

1. The Master should ensure that the crew are aware of the risks, how the virus can be spread and how to reduce the risk.
2. The ISPS requirements on ensuring that unauthorised personnel do not board the vessel should be strictly enforced throughout the duration of the vessel being in port.
3. The Master should give careful consideration to granting any shore leave whilst in impacted ports.
4. The shipowner/operator should avoid making crew changes in the ports of an affected country.
5. After departure the crew should be aware of the symptoms and report any occurring symptoms immediately to the person in charge of medical care.

The advice is supplemented with information from the World Health Organisation on the virus (available here www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs103/en)

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