



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE

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**NEWS RELEASE--FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE**

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Idaho health agencies and EMS join Boise hospitals in national exercise to transport patients with highly infectious disease

BOISE – State, local and national emergency personnel rehearsed moving patients with highly infectious disease in Boise today as part of the largest national preparedness exercise of its kind in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services history.

The three-day exercise culminated Wednesday at the Boise Airport/Gowen Field, where four role-playing patients were loaded onto a Kalitta Air 747 medical transport aircraft and flown to regional treatment centers in Spokane, Wash., and Los Angeles, Calif. Idaho does not have the capability to treat patients with highly infectious diseases such as Ebola.

The drill started early Monday morning when people acting as patients with Ebola symptoms arrived at Treasure Valley healthcare facilities. The patients were cared for at the clinics and hospitals, then transported by ambulance to other facilities, before eventually being moved to the Boise Airport and transferred into the medical transport aircraft.

Participants behaved throughout the exercise as if the incident was real, taking necessary actions and employing appropriate resources to manage and protect the patients, the workforce and the environment, as well as safely transport the patients.

At each facility, healthcare workers collected and shipped samples for diagnostic tests to state laboratories, which in turn practiced running the necessary tests to diagnose the patients with Ebola. As part of the exercise, each patient received a positive diagnosis. Using appropriate isolation techniques and personal protective equipment, health care workers then took the required steps to have the patients transported by air to designated Regional Ebola Treatment Centers. These patients were placed into mobile biocontainment units for these flights.

The local efforts were part of a Health and Human Services (HHS) test of the nationwide ability to move patients with highly infectious diseases safely and securely to regional treatment centers.

“Saving lives during crises requires preparation and training,” said Robert Kadlec, M.D., HHS Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. “A tremendous amount of coordination, synchronization, and skill is needed to move patients with highly infectious diseases safely. We have to protect the patients and the healthcare workers caring for those patients. This type of exercise helps ensure that everyone involved is ready for that level of complexity.”

Coordinated by the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, more than 50 organizations across the county participated, including the Department of State, Department of Transportation, the Regional Ebola Treatment Centers, local and state health and emergency management agencies, hospitals, airport authorities, and non-government organizations.

The exercise focuses on moving seven people acting as patients with Ebola symptoms in different regions of the country. The patients, including one pediatric patient in Texas, first presented themselves at one of the following healthcare facilities: Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center and St. Luke’s Regional Medical Center in Boise; CHI St. Luke’s Health-The Woodlands Hospital in The Woodlands, Texas; Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston, South Carolina; Norman Regional Hospital in Norman, Oklahoma.

The treatment centers that received the patients are Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles, Calif.; Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, Ga.; Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane, Wash.; and University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas. The pediatric patient was transported to Texas Children’s Hospital West Campus in Houston.

The participating airports were the Boise Airport; Charleston International Airport in Charleston, South Carolina; DeKalb-Peachtree Airport in Atlanta, Georgia; Ellington Field Airport in Houston, Texas; Los Angeles International Airport in Los Angeles, California; Spokane International Airport in Spokane, Wash.; and Will Rogers World Airport in Oklahoma City, Okla. Upon arrival, local emergency responders transferred the patients to ground ambulances for transportation from the airports to the treatment centers.

HHS and the Department of State previously collaborated on exercises to move Americans acting as Ebola patients from West African countries to Ebola treatment centers in the United States. In public health emergencies or disasters, the U.S. government orchestrates the return of Americans to the United States, including Americans who are sick or injured.

Participants will gather on April 13 to assess the exercise, compare actions across the country, and share best practices for moving patients with highly infectious diseases.

Quotes from participating agencies:

“Being able to participate in a high-risk practice event like this one is incredibly important so we can be sure we are prepared to respond appropriately in a real-life event while we protect the health and safety of the patients, the first responders and healthcare professionals, as well as the general public.” -- Matt Dudley, Preparedness Program manager, Division of Public Health, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare

“Large-scale trainings like this help us work together to contain infectious disease while providing the highest level of medical care to our patients. It’s imperative to run these kinds of drills, so in the unlikely event this were to occur in Ada County, we’d be prepared to

manage the intricate nature of this patient condition while keeping our community safe.” -- Hadley Mayes, Public Information Officer for Ada County Paramedics

“Working with our incredible local partners, this exercise was a chance for St. Luke’s teams to take the lessons and practices we consistently train for and apply them during a real-life, large-scale scenario. While we hope to never have to deploy these skills, it’s valuable to have that hands-on experience, and after this week our teams not only feel more confident in the training they’ve had, but identified additional areas where we can concentrate in the future.” -- Lisa Spanberger, St. Luke’s Disaster Preparedness Officer

“The excellence of our area hospitals and community partners has really shone through in this large-scale exercise. The last three days of in-hospital activity, multiple coordination calls, leading up to today’s successful exercise of transporting patients, has been of great value for those directly involved. The coordination and communication demonstrated across all agencies under such critical circumstances is an invaluable asset to the communities we serve.” — Natalie Bodine, Public Health Preparedness Training and Exercise Coordinator for Central District Health Department

Attached photo courtesy of Idaho Department of Health and Welfare / Chris Smith
A role-playing “patient” is prepared for boarding a Kalitta Air 747 medical transport aircraft through the nose cone as part of a full-scale emergency preparedness exercise to rehearse capabilities for moving patients with highly infectious diseases, such as Ebola. Four “patients” were transported Wednesday morning from Saint Alphonsus Health System and St. Luke’s Health System by Ada County Paramedics and St. Luke’s Air to the Boise Airport.

Note to editors:

- *Additional photos and video from the Idaho event are available from each participating agency. Media contact for each is below.*
- *Video sound bites from Dr. Kadlec are available for download at https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ktvdv44y7z68ly7/AAAf2H_JzzY8i-tzREY6VfaAa?dl=0*

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