

# PHEP Funding Provides Foundation for LA County's Ebola Response

As Ebola persons under investigation (PUI) (i.e., patients with symptoms that could be from Ebola) began to surface in Los Angeles County, its Department of Public Health relied upon a strong foundation in public health emergency preparedness to safely and efficiently protect its over 10 million residents. Specifically, the Department of Public Health worked with first responders and healthcare system partners to prepare for and respond to each potential Ebola patient within a hospital setting. However, as the Ebola outbreak progressed, it became clear the county needed a less resource intensive method for assessing low risk PUIs.



*Stella Fogleman,  
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Bringing a potential Ebola patient into an Ebola treatment center requires extensive planning and resources. For example, emergency medical services personnel must be educated on the use of personal protective equipment and know how to safely transport the patient to the treatment center. Healthcare facilities must have isolation units exclusively dedicated to these patients. Staffing requirements are heightened to adhere to safety guidelines in properly putting on, taking off, and using personal protective equipment in caring for a potential Ebola patient.

A physician from one LA County Ebola treatment center raised these planning and resource concerns at a Public Health Emergency Preparedness/Healthcare Preparedness Program (PHEP/HPP) healthcare coalition meeting. He recommended sending a dedicated health assessment and specimen collection team to the patient rather than transporting the patient to the hospital. This would reduce unnecessary burden on the treatment centers while making

sure that safety was the number one priority. The Department of Health supported this approach, finding that it would be far less disruptive to healthcare delivery systems.

LA County's Department of Public Health

consulted with the California State Department of Public Health and CDC to ensure agreement on the approach. LA County's Emergency Preparedness and Response Program Director, Stella Fogleman said, "The decision to perform the in-home assessment and specimen collection for low risk PUIs posed a challenge because of the lack of precedence or written guidance; but the team was confident that in-home evaluations could be done effectively and safely."

When it was time to actually conduct an in-home evaluation, LA County's Community Health Services program coordinated with the patient and agreed on the plan to assess and collect lab specimens at the home. The Department of Public Health also worked closely with local fire and police departments, emergency medical services, communications, and Ebola treatment center physicians to establish an on-scene incident command staging area at a fire station near the PUI's home. The patient was assessed in the home and the public health laboratory worked with the physicians to ensure proper specimen collection, packaging, and transport. Test results were available within 3 hours and there was no disruption to regular healthcare delivery services. The in-home medical evaluation and specimen collection were successful, resulting in improved processes for future public health responses.

*According to Fogleman, PHEP funding and CDC support provides LA County's Department of Public Health, "a foundation for establishing our public health emergency preparedness and allows us to maintain a robust preparedness and response program." The Department of Public Health uses PHEP funding to provide additional resources and staffing support to the Acute Communicable Disease Control program and to expand testing potential for high-risk agents at the lab, while maintaining essential public health laboratory services.*

## LA County Prepares for Ebola

LA County's Environmental Health Division hosted an Ebola preparedness demonstration, training staff on proper PPE and decontamination procedures.



Photo credit: LA County Department of Public Health, Environmental Health Division