



Update on Ebola: Perspectives on an Epidemic From the Health Association of African Canadians (HAAC); November 22, 2014

This is a brief update of the Ebola epidemic based on a panel discussion at Dalhousie University Medical School on November 20th, 2014. The panel which included doctors, a public health official, a community member from West Africa, and a bioethicist, covered topics such as the science behind the disease, and the impact of the disease in West Africa, and here in Nova Scotia. The panel was moderated by Dr. David Haase, Co-President, Health Association of African Canadians.

What we know:

- The epidemic is still ongoing, and although appears to be slowing in some areas, is still progressing in others. There are multiple organizations working with local health authorities to treat infected individuals, and implement measures to control the outbreak.

- Once infected, individuals begin to show symptoms anywhere from 2-21 days afterwards.

- A person will not spread the disease until they are showing symptoms.*** Infection is spread from person to person through contact with blood and other body fluids of the infected person who is having symptoms.

- Symptoms are similar to the flu: fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, muscle pain, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, and headache are common. Treatment includes rehydration and a variety of medications to treat the symptoms that are present. Specific drugs to directly control the virus, and vaccines for preventing infection are presently in development.

- A major concern is the burial of those who have passed away from the disease as they are highly infectious. The good news is that the WHO and other agencies are working with the affected communities to ensure that burial practices are safer but still maintain dignity and respect for cultural practices.

- There is a very low probability that Ebola will be seen in Nova Scotia. However, should the need arise, Nova Scotia has plans in place to treat infected individuals, and prevent the spread of the infection.

- While no one in Nova Scotia has been infected with Ebola,*** individuals in Nova Scotian communities have lost family members, and friends in West Africa. These losses and concern about family and friends is taking a toll on our brothers and sisters and their mental health. There are also increased financial costs as phone bills are increasing and families are sending money to their relatives to help in any way they can. There is also concern about the healthcare systems in West Africa, as many healthcare professionals have also passed away. Rebuilding this capacity will be an important part of the international response moving forward.

- There is serious stigma attached to this epidemic. Our people are suffering because of discrimination based on misinformation or false information. ***As HAAC members, we can be informed. We can also help others be informed and resist irrational fear about interacting with people from West Africa living in Nova Scotia.***

Make informed decisions about the Ebola Vaccine Trial

Historical incidents of exploitation have caused mistrust of health systems across the African Diaspora for decades. However, Black People need to make informed health decisions in 2014. There is an Ebola vaccine trial presently happening in Halifax. Some of us may want to consider participating. HAAC encourages our Members to learn about this trial and make an informed decision about participating. More information can be found here - <http://www.centerforvaccinology.ca/study/Ebola-vaccine-study/>.