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October 14, 2014

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Ohio Department of Health and State Healthcare Leaders Conduct Ebola Preparedness Tabletop Exercise and Planning Seminar

Builds on Ebola Preparations Begun Over the Summer

COLUMBUS – Building on preparations which began over the summer, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and state healthcare leaders conducted a tabletop exercise and planning seminar today at the State Emergency Operations Center to identify ways to improve Ohio’s Ebola preparedness at the local and state levels and coordination with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Leaders from the Ohio Hospital Association, the Ohio State Medical Association, the Association of Ohio Health Commissioners, and the Ohio Department of Public Safety’s Division of Emergency Medical Services participated in the day’s events, along with several other organizations, associations and state agencies.

“While Ebola does not pose an immediate risk to Ohio residents, out of an abundance of caution ODH is working with local health departments, healthcare providers and other state agencies to be prepared,” said ODH Director Richard Hodges. “We are also educating people who may travel to the Ebola outbreak areas of West Africa about what they can do to protect themselves and others.”

Since July, ODH has provided Ebola consultation and guidance to those on the frontline of healthcare in Ohio – hospitals, physicians, other healthcare professionals and local health departments. Guidance has covered such topics as recognizing Ebola symptoms, taking patient travel histories to identify travelers to and from West Africa, and how to treat possible Ebola patients while protecting other patients and staff.

“Ohio hospitals are committed to preparing to take care of a potential Ebola patient while protecting other patients and employees, and the Ohio Hospital Association will engage and support our members in these efforts,” said Mike Abrams, president and chief executive officer of the Ohio Hospital Association.

“The chief concern of Ohio physicians is to provide quality patient care and to assure we all live in healthier Ohio communities,” said Ohio State Medical Association executive director D. Brent Mulgrew. “The Ohio State Medical Association stands with healthcare leaders and providers across the state in preparing to keep Ohioans healthy and safe against the Ebola virus by sharing appropriate information and providing proper care, when necessary.”

“Ohio’s health commissioners are already deeply involved in Ebola preparedness through the local health departments they lead. We support efforts to increase collaboration and coordination at the local and state levels to strengthen the state’s overall preparedness,” said Shelia Hiddleston, R.N., president of the Association of Ohio Health Commissioners board.

“Ohio’s emergency medical services providers are truly at the frontline and often are the first ones to treat an individual. We are committed to working with EMS providers, a vital segment of our healthcare system, as part of Ohio’s Ebola preparedness efforts,” said Carol Cunningham, M.D., state medical director of the Ohio Department of Public Safety’s Division of Emergency Medical Services.

In a related development, CDC has designated the ODH Lab as a bio-safety level 3 lab that is qualified to conduct initial Ebola testing. Confirmatory testing still is conducted by CDC.

Ebola is spread through direct contact with the blood or body fluids of a person sick with Ebola, or through items contaminated with the person’s blood or body fluids. Ebola is not spread through the air, food or water. For more information about Ebola, visit ODH’s website at www.odh.ohio.gov.

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