

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 6, 2014

Dr. Tom Frieden
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329-4027

Dear Dr. Frieden,

As a Member of Congress, I write you today deeply concerned with the administration's most recent announcement regarding their unwillingness to provide updated airport screening guidelines for international commercial flights with travelers entering the United States. As of September 20, 2014 our nation encountered the first exposed instance of the Ebola epidemic, also known as Ebola virus disease (EVD), from airline passenger Thomas Duncan. The administration announced on October 1, 2014, that West African airports offer adequate EVD screenings for connecting commercial airline passengers entering into the United States. Mr. Duncan's access into the United States serves as an example that the current EVD screening process is inefficient for international commercial flights departing from Africa and connecting into other countries, prior to entering into the United States. Therefore, further precautions should be implemented to ensure public health and national security.

While there are no direct flights from Liberia to the United States, many citizens are concerned with the EVD screening protocols in place for connecting international commercial flights from Africa into the United States. That being said, North Carolina is home to two international commercial airports located in Raleigh and Charlotte. Raleigh permits three connecting international flights from Africa into the United States through: London, Toronto, and Cancun. Therefore, if the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) refuses to issue updated guidelines or an emergency protocol for airlines, we are placing North Carolinians in danger by introducing a risky situation that could, otherwise, have been prevented.

As a member of Energy and Commerce and speaking as a former nurse, I ask that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the CDC create and enforce updated guidelines or an emergency action plan for the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in order to prevent this epidemic from spreading within our nation via international commercial travel. Additionally, I ask the CDC to create and enforce an Emergency Containment Action Plan for international commercial travelers prior to leaving their respective countries.

On behalf of my constituents in the Second District of North Carolina, I have several questions regarding the procedure for CDC and CBP to protect our nation's citizens from this tragic epidemic. Recently, Dr. Beth Bell from the CDC stated that any additional guidelines for commercial international travel are duplicative of the current exit screening protocol taking place in Africa. Therefore, I respectfully ask that you respond to the following questions:

1. Do you confirm that the current CDC EVD screening protocol is effective?
 - a. If so, how does Mr. Duncan's case prove the current system is effective?
2. For inbound passengers, it has been relayed that CBP conducts passive screenings and if a passenger appears ill, he or she will be referred to a secondary screening. Other than CBP personnel, does CDC have an EVD expert on site for these secondary screenings?

3. For screening purposes, CDC personnel are present at a number of international ports of entry, but which ports of entry within the United States currently have CDC personnel present?
4. With respect to screening, exit screening is ongoing from African airports and travelers temperatures are taken prior to boarding.
 - a. What protocol is in place for passengers exiting the aircraft?
 - b. What are your methods for testing thermometer instruments for quality?
5. According to the Public Health Service Act, The Secretary of HHS and the Surgeon General grant CDC the authority to carry out the practice of isolation and quarantine.
 - a. Therefore, does CDC have a current emergency action plan for individuals entering the United States who are EVD positive?
 - b. Other than hospitals, where are the facilities located that are used for quarantine?

As of October 3, 2014, I confirmed with Raleigh-Durham International Airport's (RDU) administrative staff that no CDC personnel are on site at RDU for EVD screening purposes. This information is alarming, as RDU is an international port for three connecting flights from Africa into the United States. Therefore, before this tragic epidemic becomes a national security threat to our country, I implore you to update existing guidelines and/or create an emergency action plan with CDC experts involved. I look forward to reviewing your responses.

Sincerely,



Renee L. Ellmers
Member of Congress

Cc:

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