THE EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE (EVD)

Introduction:
The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) currently affecting four (4) African countries - Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria - currently poses no substantial risk to persons living in Trinidad and Tobago and to date there are no cases of individuals contracting the EVD in this country. The Health Services Unit (HSU) at the St. Augustine Campus is closely monitoring information about the virus through the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov/ and the World Health Organisation (WHO) www.who.int/, and will endeavor to update the Campus community as the need arises.

Students and staff who are from any of the affected countries or who have travelled to those countries within the last 21 days should contact the Health Services Unit at the St. Augustine Campus with respect to fever surveillance. The HSU has created a protocol http://sta.uwi.edu/health/ for the monitoring of fever and all staff and students who have travelled to these affected areas recently or who have come in contact with persons who have travelled to these areas should familiarise themselves with this protocol.

FACTS ABOUT EBOLA

What is Ebola?
Ebola is an infection caused by a virus. It causes a viral hemorrhagic fever and is characterised by a high fever and abnormal bleeding.

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms of the Ebola can start anywhere from 2 to 21 days after being infected. The typical symptoms are a sudden onset of fever, muscle pain, headaches and sometimes nausea vomiting and diarrhea may follow.

How is Ebola transmitted?
The disease is spread through direct contact with the body fluids such as urine, blood, feces or semen of persons who are ILL with the Ebola virus. Ebola is not contracted through water, air or food. Ebola is not a respiratory disease like the Flu and cannot be transmitted via mosquitoes like the Chikungunya virus.

All body fluids are considered to be potentially infectious. Please note that persons who are not ill but may be infected cannot transmit the Ebola Virus. Infected animals and objects such as needles which may have been contaminated by body fluids also pose a risk of transmission of this disease.

Is there a cure for Ebola?
No there is no cure for EVD currently and the treatment involves early detection and supportive management. The current outbreak has a mortality rate of greater than 50%.

Who is at risk for this disease?
At present disease outbreaks are located in four West African countries. Persons living in Trinidad and Tobago are currently regarded as being at low risk of contracting this disease. People who have been in contact with the body fluids of people with Ebola are at the greatest risk. Also at risk are those persons who provided care for people who were ill with the Ebola Virus Disease or have been in contact with the bodies of persons who died from Ebola.

Please note that family members living with persons who are suspected of having the Ebola Virus are also considered to be at low risk unless they have engaged in one of the above activities.
What precautions are being taken at The UWI?

The HSU is currently monitoring information and following the recommendations from the CDC and the WHO. We are also working closely with the Office of Occupational Health, Safety and the Environment to ensure that the appropriate protocols are in place and staff and students receive appropriate and current information about this highly infectious disease.

It is important to note that the Ministry of Health is working closely with the Port Health Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and they have introduced measures for assisting in identifying travelers who show signs and symptoms of this disease. These measures include surveillance of passengers for fever and other Ebola related symptoms, contact tracing, database management and health education. All passengers on arrival to Trinidad and Tobago from the four affected countries are expected to complete a health education questionnaire at the various port authorities.

If I recently travelled from one of the affected countries what should I do?

- Notify the Health Services Unit immediately on arrival to Trinidad.
- Report daily to the Nurse at the HSU for the surveillance of symptoms.
- If you develop fever within 21 days of exposure or have travelled from an endemic country seek health care immediately.

Please note that if you have a fever but have not travelled to one of the four countries listed in the last 21 days do not be alarmed. Visit the HSU or any other health care provider as you would when you are ill.

Is it safe to be in the same dorm with a person from an infected country?

Yes. Currently the risk of contracting the EVD is extremely low. A person infected with Ebola can only transmit the disease after they have developed symptoms and therefore a student would have to be in direct contact with the bodily fluids of a symptomatic person and those fluids would have to enter the healthy person’s body through breaks in the skin or through mucous membranes in order for the virus to be passed. The above scenarios are highly unlikely to occur in places such as dorms and apartment buildings.

What should I do to protect my health should I come in contact with persons returning from countries who are infected?

The EVD currently poses little or no risk to the population and it is not contagious until symptoms appear. It is spread through direct contact with bodily fluids such as urine, blood, feces, semen of an infected person or objects such as needles that have been contaminated with the virus. Transmission can also occur through intimate contact such as sexual activity. The EVD can be found in semen up to seven weeks after recovery of the disease. It is always good to regularly wash your hands with soap and water and use hand sanitiser if available.

Who should I contact at the Health Services Unit?:

Nurse – Ext 82149
Doctor – Ext 82150
Main Office – Ext 82153
Emergency Medical Transport Unit – 728-2408
Blackberry PIN – 22D54441
Website – http://sta.uwi.edu/health/