

GUIDELINE STATEMENT REGARDING
TRAVEL TO EBOLA AFFECTED COUNTRIES BY EMPLOYEES OF PARTNERS
HEALTHCARE AND ITS MEMBER HOSPITALS, PHYSICIAN ORGANIZATIONS, AND
HEALTH CENTERS DURING AND/OR ON BEHALF OF THE 2014 EBOLA EPIDEMIC

Prepared by: Occupational Health Services, Risk and Insurance Services, Emergency Preparedness, and Global Ebola Task Force

Reviewed by: Human Resources Executive Committee

I. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Partners HealthCare System, Inc. (Partners) and its member hospitals, physician organizations, and health centers (hereafter “members”) continue to monitor the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The situation remains dynamic; the number of cases and deaths continues to climb. As of October 7, 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have in place Level 3 Travel warnings for Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. A Level 3 Warning means that all US residents are urged to avoid nonessential travel to these countries. It is anticipated, however, that personnel from Partners and its hospitals will soon be requesting to travel to Ebola affected countries as part of the medical and public health response to the epidemic there.

On September 15, 2014, Partners HealthCare and its members issued a [Guideline Statement Regarding Possible Ebola Deployment for Employees/Volunteers](#) which included important considerations for individuals wanting to volunteer. This document provides an update to that guidance. Partners HealthCare and its members recognize that the key to managing Ebola’s threat in the United States is to manage the epidemic overseas. In addition, Partners and its members have staff and expertise which could aid in that effort.

As we know, there are risks, but there are individuals among our staff with a desire and requisite set of experience, knowledge, and ability to help during this time of great need. As an organization we want to be supportive, yet offer the appropriate cautions.

In this document we specify the policies and procedures required for Partners and its members to endorse travel or volunteering with any organization or response agency. It is important to note:

- These recommendations are guided by a focus on the health and safety of volunteers, their families, their colleagues, and the patients they serve. Further guidance may be forthcoming as the epidemic evolves.
- References to “employee” within this document pertain to individuals who are employed by Partners and/or any of its member hospitals, physician organizations, and health centers.

- These guidelines will be interpreted and applied within the employment and other policy at each institution.
- The specific terms of the traveling/deploying benefits continuation and job protection largely correspond to the employee’s employment status and type of leave granted, which may include a leave of absence or secondment. The specific terms should be communicated by Human Resources and the manager to the employee prior to traveling/deployment.

The purpose of this guideline is to:

1. Describe the scenarios under which employees of Partners and its members may travel to an area of active Ebola transmission.
2. Identify required notifications to be made and approvals to be officially obtained from an employee’s employer as well as specific limitations to his/her employee benefits before and after employee travel – for personal, professional, or volunteer purposes - to an area of active Ebola transmission.
3. Provide a prospective traveler/response volunteer and/or his/her manager with information and guidance to enable those individuals to make an informed decision about the risks of such activities.

II. TRAVEL AND RESPONSE CLASSIFICATIONS

Four travel scenarios are described as follows:

1. “Sponsored” volunteer responses are those in which an employee travels to an area of active Ebola transmission and responds with an organization that has satisfactorily demonstrated to the employee, manager, and appropriate subject matter experts (e.g., may include Partners Risk and Insurance Services, the hospital’s global health/humanitarian experts) that the organization meets the criteria included in the September 15th Deployment Guidelines Statement and a determination is made that the employee’s volunteer response is considered employer-related work in relation to Partners and its members and will be paid based on employment and leave status for the deployment.
2. “Supported” volunteer responses are those in which an employee travels to an area of active Ebola transmission and responds with an organization that has satisfactorily demonstrated to the employee, manager, and appropriate subject matter experts (e.g., may include Partners Risk and Insurance Services, the hospital’s global health/humanitarian experts) that the organization meets the criteria included in the September 15th Deployment Guideline Statement; however, the deployment is not considered to be employer-related work in relation to Partners and its members.
3. “Non-supported, non-sponsored” volunteer responses are those in which an employee travels to an area of active Ebola transmission and responds with an organization that has not satisfactorily demonstrated to the employee, manager, and appropriate subject

matter experts (e.g., may include Partners Risk and Insurance Services, the hospital's global health/humanitarian experts) that the organization meets the criteria included in the September 15th deployment guideline statement. The deployment is not considered to be employer-related work in relation to Partners and its members. These employees are urged to consult with Partners Risk and Insurance Services and consider all aspects of personal health and safety prior to departure.

4. "Personal travel" includes employees who travel to an area of active Ebola transmission for personal reasons. All employees are strongly encouraged to avoid nonessential personal travel to these areas. If there are compelling personal reasons for such travel, the employee is advised to consult with Partners Risk and Insurance Services and consider all aspects of personal health and safety prior to departure. This travel is not part of employer-related work in relation to Partners and its members.

See section III below for employee leave, furlough, and compensation considerations.

III. GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYEES AND MANGEMENT (INCLUDING SUPERVISORS)

- a. **Approval for deployment:** Trainees will not be approved for Ebola patient care deployments as per a decision of Partners and its members Chief Medical Officers and Chief Nursing Officers on October 21, 2014. All other employees requesting approval for deployment must be evaluated for experience and fitness for the planned assignment. Identified global health/humanitarian experts at Partners and its members are useful resources in these evaluations.
- b. **Required Notification:** All employees who are travelling **MUST** contact the Occupational Health Services Clinic at his/her site prior to personal or professional travel to an area with active Ebola transmission. OHS will connect the employee with relevant global health/humanitarian contacts and the Partners Risk and Insurance. For employees traveling to participate in the global Ebola response, additional pre-deployment activities will occur as per the "Partners Management and Response Plan for Deployments by Staff of Partners Healthcare and its Members to Ebola (EVD) Affected Countries" (*document pending approval*). Further, all employees and management (including supervisors) should review the Guideline Statement Regarding Possible Ebola Deployment for Employees/Volunteers.
- c. **Furlough Considerations:** Upon return from an area with active Ebola transmission, as per [CDC guidance](#), employees will be placed under active or direct active monitoring based upon their level of risk as determined by public health authorities – this applies to all returning travelers regardless of the reason for travel or activities while traveling. All returning employees must contact OHS prior to return to work to assess level of risk. Individuals who have provided direct patient care will be automatically furloughed for 21 days. If they have

traveled for personal reasons or have not provided direct patient care, they will be assessed for their level of risk and should be aware that a 21 day furlough may be required. In the past when a susceptible employee has sustained an occupational exposure to an infectious disease during the course of their employment, the employee has been furloughed from work throughout the incubation period. The Human Resources leadership has agreed to provide continuous and regular pay to an employee who is furloughed due to a work related exposure to EVD. Employees who sustain an exposure to EVD outside of the course of employment either through a personal contact or a non-supported and or non-sponsored travel to an area of active EVD transmission will be required to use their own accrued sick time or vacation time to cover the lost wages due to the furlough. Employees should consider this furlough period and the availability of sufficient accrued sick or vacation time when deciding whether to travel. Supervisors should consider the required or potential absence for 21 days past the employees' return to the US when approving leave. As part of the required pre-deployment visit to OHS, compensation-related questions and concerns will be discussed with employees considering traveling to an area with active EVD transmission.

Benefit Continuation: Employees who have benefits will continue to maintain those benefits during travel, for personal or professional purposes, to an area of active EVD transmission. Health insurance, life insurance, and disability insurance will not be affected. However the benefit package does not cover airlifts back to the United States after exposure to EVD or after developing symptoms of EVD. Although business travel accident insurance and evacuation benefits cover employees during employment-related travel, the unique circumstances of the EVD outbreak impose significant challenges and limitations. Partners' and its members' ability to help across a range of issues including medical assistance and evacuation - even non-EVD related - will be practically non-existent and is not guaranteed. The ability to evacuate an employee will be reviewed on a case by case basis and will take into consideration location, health status, national and world health guidelines and likelihood that a safe evacuation can be made. Employees who have not enrolled in benefits available to them as an employee of Partners and/or members will be advised to contact their benefits provider for information. As part of the required pre-deployment/pre-travel visit to OHS, any benefits questions and concerns will be discussed with employees considering travel to EVD countries.