Anita Barkin, director of University Health Services, issued the following update on the university's Ebola preparedness on Wednesday, Oct. 22.

Dear Campus Community:

As the world health care community has increased efforts to contain the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and given that cases have now occurred on U.S. soil, I am writing to provide an update to the campus community regarding steps the emergency planning team has been taking to keep the campus safe.

Since my last communication to you on this matter in August, University Health Services (UHS) has continued to engage in communications with local health care agencies on emergency response to Ebola and has developed protocols based on best practice guidelines outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Containment of the infection is highly dependent upon careful screening of individuals with fever who have traveled to/from West Africa and/or have been directly exposed to the blood and bodily fluids of infected individuals. Suspected cases must be immediately isolated in a hospital setting.

In the unlikely event that a suspected case would present itself to UHS, we have protocols in place — consistent with those of local health care agencies — to identify and transport that patient to the hospital. University Police and Student EMS have screening protocols in place and are receiving training. We also are planning to conduct further training and drills with local expert partners from UPMC.

It is important to remember that individuals who do not have symptoms are not contagious. The virus is not transmitted by air or water. It is transmitted by direct contact with the blood or bodily fluids of someone who is already experiencing symptoms. Symptoms of the Ebola virus include fever, headache, joint and muscle aches, weakness, diarrhea, vomiting, stomach pain, lack of appetite and abnormal bleeding, and can occur up to 21 days after exposure to someone with the active disease.

Travel Protocol

The CDC continues to warn individuals to avoid nonessential travel to Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. Given the gravity of the situation, the university strongly discourages faculty, staff and students from traveling to the affected areas. If travel to the region is unavoidable, you are to contact UHS at 412-268-2158 for a pre-departure consultation.

If you do travel to an affected area, we expect you to call UHS at 412-268-2158 prior to returning to campus. You will be expected to self-monitor your health for up to 21 days. If you develop fever, you should call UPMC or Allegheny General Hospital before going to the hospital for care. When you call the hospital, explain that you have recently traveled to an affected region and explain your symptoms so that they can advise you on how to approach the health care facility for care. You should also contact UHS so we can address any concerns related to potential contacts in the university community, and discuss isolation procedures for individuals who may have come in close contact with an individual suspected of having the active disease.

As a global university community that regularly welcomes international students, faculty, researchers and visitors, we recognize the need to remain informed and prepared to respond to global public health issues. CMU’s emergency management team will continue to closely monitor the situation and maintain contact with the Allegheny County Health Department and other partners in the community. Persons who have questions or concerns should contact University Health Services at 412-268-2158.

In addition to our efforts here, I will continue to consult with administrators at our campus locations around the globe to advise them on the appropriate precautionary measures, training and procedures they should be implementing.

As is our practice, we will provide periodic updates as the situation evolves. For more information about Ebola, including symptoms, transmission and treatment, and travel advice, visit the CDC website at http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/.