



For immediate release

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New York Employers Urged to Prioritize Ebola Preparedness

New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) Releases Fact Sheets to Help Protect Healthcare Workers, Airport Workers and the General Public Amid Growing Concern Over Ebola

New York, NY—Today, the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) teamed up with the New York State Nurses Association, 32BJ SEIU, and DC37 and urged employers to make Ebola preparedness a top priority.

NYCOSH released new Ebola factsheets to better educate employers, healthcare workers, airport workers, and the public on how Ebola is transmitted and what protections are necessary for workers who may come into contact with Ebola-infected patients or infectious body fluids.

One factsheet is aimed at the general worker population, with special emphasis on healthcare workers; the second is targeted to airport workers.

Both fact-sheets can be downloaded and read here:

<http://nycosh.org/uploads/news/id186/NYCOSH-EbolaFactsheet-Final.pdf>

<http://nycosh.org/uploads/news/id185/NYCOSH-Aircraft%20Ebola-Final.pdf>

Today's release is part of an ongoing public education campaign on worker protection and Ebola led by NYCOSH, a leading voice for workplace safety and health in New York.

“Workers in healthcare facilities and at airports are on the frontlines of this public health crisis. With the first documented cases of Ebola in the U.S., employers need to provide thorough training for their employees. At a minimum, workers must be given face-to-face interactive training on how to put on and take off their personal protective equipment to prevent the spread of Ebola,” **said Charlene Obernauer, Executive Director of NYCOSH.**

NYCOSH also pointed to the results of the recent National Nurses Union study, which found that most nurses think their hospitals are not adequately prepared for the Ebola virus.

“Much more needs to be done to educate all workers, as lack of information leads to heightened fear and confusion. Employers need to protect their workers, and that requires proper planning, training, and resources. When workers are protected, public health is also protected,” **said Obernauer**, referring to OSHA’s Bloodborne Pathogens Standard.¹

Unions spoke to the need to ensure adequate, hands-on training for nurses—in addition to personal protective gear—so that nurses can focus on providing safe, quality care to potential Ebola patients in New York.

“As nurses, our number one priority is to provide safe, quality care to every patient,” **said Jill Furillo, RN, Executive Director of the New York State Nurses Association**. “We need protocols in place, and adequate hands-on training and protective gear so that we are prepared to safely and appropriately respond to epidemics of infectious diseases. We are calling on hospitals across the state to join with us to ensure that every possible measure is taken to protect patients and caregivers from the spread of Ebola virus disease.”

“Coordination among agencies at all levels of government is critical in preventing the spread of Ebola. The City of New York should immediately adopt strict protocols and procedures and implement them in both clinical and non-clinical settings,” **said Guillermina Mejia, Safety and Health Director at DC37**. “Education and training as well as hands on drills are important steps towards breaking the chain of infection. DC 37 and other unions are meeting with city representatives to address potential risks to our members if a case is diagnosed in the city.”

Additionally, 32BJ SEIU spoke to the need for increased training for workers that are exposed to blood or potentially infectious materials on the job, particularly airport workers.

“Airport workers are in contact with bodily fluids almost every day,” **said Hector Figueroa, President of 32BJ SEIU**. “During the Ebola and Infectious Disease Awareness Training that 32BJ held we heard from so many airport workers who do not feel safe on the job, who said they do not receive adequate personal protective equipment that they need to avoid these potentially hazardous conditions. Contractors should follow OSHA regulations and provide this equipment now, so workers can keep themselves safe.”

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¹ OSHA’s Bloodborne Pathogen Standard requires employers to determine which work tasks might expose workers to infectious or potentially infectious materials and to implement an Exposure Control Plan to eliminate or minimize employee exposure.

NYCOSH is a non-profit organization that advocates for the right of every worker to a safe and healthful workplace.