

## Calvert Health officer discusses Ebola and the flu

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### Dr. Laurence Polsky

Prince Frederick, MD – The Calvert County Commissioners convene as the Board of Health for the purpose of receiving a status report from the county health officer. On Tuesday, Oct. 28 Dr. Laurence Polsky delivered an update, which featured information on what is being done locally and nationally to protect citizens from the dreaded and often deadly infection Ebola.

"It is a nasty virus," said Polsky, who explained the scourge damages infected victims' vital organs and destroys blood cells. The current outbreak of the disease, which was first discovered during the late 1970s, has yielded 10 times more deaths to this point than the previous largest outbreak. Polsky stated the current outbreak is large because it started in the worst place—the intersection of three poor countries in Africa. Those countries have limited health care. The reservoir for Ebola, said Polsky, is in certain species of bats and primates. The fatality rate in the aforementioned African countries is 70 percent.

Polsky noted airport screening procedures have intensified for travelers coming to the U.S. from Liberia, Guinea or Sierra Leone. Health officials are continuing to "refine protocols to isolate those who may be incubating the virus," Polsky stated adding the isolation is "typically nine to 11 days after acquiring the virus until symptoms appear," which can take as long as 21 days. Health officials in the U.S. "continue to refine the protocols to protect hospital staff and first responders."

In addition to the Calvert County Health Department, the local partners preparing to deal with possible cases of Ebola are Calvert Memorial Hospital, emergency medical services teams, 911 dispatchers, the Calvert County Sheriff's Office and local medical offices. Polsky assured the commissioners all the partners are in daily contact with federal and state experts regarding Ebola.

The health officer further advised that Ebola infection only occurs "after direct contact with someone who is already sick from Ebola. Currently, people capable of transmitting Ebola are in Africa or under the watch of the Centers for Disease Control."

Polsky stated anyone who has traveled to any of the three impacted African countries in the past 21 days "or who has had body fluid contact with someone with recent travel, should notify the Calvert County Health Department for instructions."

With flu season approaching, Polsky urged all county residents to get vaccinated. Influenza, he stated, is the eighth leading cause of death in the U.S.

Polsky stated employers would be wise to encourage employees to get the flu vaccine and it makes good business sense to go so far as to offer to pay for the workers' shots. Business owners could be plagued with "poor productivity" if employees have to miss work due to the flu or even worse, attempt to work while sick.

He told the board 2,383 elementary school students in Calvert County have been vaccinated in 2014. Polsky credited teachers, school administrators, school nurses and parent volunteers for helping bring about a 10.5 percent increase in the number of Calvert elementary students vaccinated over the past year.

In other health news, Polsky reported Calvert had the fourth-highest increase in health insurance enrollees among Maryland jurisdictions this year. He also reported as part of the department's efforts to raise awareness of domestic violence a "healthy relationship" project is being implemented in county high schools.

"You have brought a lot of confidence to this county with your expertise," Commissioners' President Pat Nutter [R] told Polsky.

The health officer in turn credited his "wonderful staff" at the Calvert County Health Department for the recent successes.

More information on health-related services in Calvert County may be found at <http://www.calverthealth.org>

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