



A Union of Professionals
**AFT Nurses and
Health Professionals** ♥

Is Our Workplace Ready for Ebola?

In the wake of multiple confirmed Ebola cases in the United States, AFT Nurses and Health Professionals is keeping locals on the cutting edge of preparedness by providing resources and guidance about the virus. One of the most important ways you, as a local leader, can prepare for potential Ebola cases in the workplace is to request a bargaining session with your employer to discuss Ebola readiness. Since health and safety issues are mandatory bargaining subjects, employers have a legal obligation to sit down with union leaders and discuss matters related to limiting exposure to Ebola.

Whether your labor-management relationship is cooperative, with the free flow of information, or more challenging, with every conversation about working conditions requiring assertion of your basic rights to information, assessing preparedness for Ebola cases in your facility is an important first step. It is imperative that local leaders know the status of infection-control protocol; occupational health and preparedness plans; quantity, sufficiency and location of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE); and training on protocol and proper use of PPE in the workplace.

The following list, adapted from a Health Professionals and Allied Employees sample demand letter, is a helpful resource in setting the agenda for a meeting with employers and contains basic questions local union leaders are entitled to have answered:

1. Are there written policies and procedures in place for infection control and occupational health that specifically address readiness to care for an Ebola patient? If so, please provide a copy of all such policies and procedures. If not, are there specific plans to develop such policies and procedures, and when will they be provided to the union?
2. Please provide details of the systems, policies or procedures that are in place to apply standard and expanded precautions when providing care to ALL patients, regardless of the signs and symptoms they present.
3. Are there systems, policies or procedures in place for early identification and isolation of suspected or confirmed Ebola cases? If so, please provide details about all such systems, policies and procedures. If not, are there specific plans to develop such policies and procedures, and when will notification of those be provided to the union?
4. Please provide copies of all procedures in place for triage, reception areas and the emergency department.
5. What signs and equipment, such as tissues, respirators, masks and hand sanitizers, are available where patients present to quickly identify and isolate suspected cases? Where is signage located?
6. Does the facility have the ability to quickly isolate suspected or confirmed Ebola cases in isolation rooms? Please provide details of the procedure.

- a. Is restricted access to and dedicated equipment for these areas ensured? If so, what standards and/or protocols are being followed to ensure restricted access and dedicated equipment?
 - b. Do these rooms have negative air pressure?
7. Is there a staffing plan to identify and train volunteer clinical and nonclinical personnel for Ebola patient care areas? Or, is the assignment process a selection by management? Has the process been implemented in accordance with the CBA? Will these staff members receive extensive hands-on training as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention? Please provide details of the plan.
8. Are there procedures in place to ensure that, prior to entering the patient isolation rooms/areas, all visitors and healthcare workers properly use personal protective equipment and rigorously perform hand hygiene? Please provide details of the procedures.
9. Is there an adequate supply of PPE, including gloves, gowns, boots/closed shoes with overshoes, respirators, and eye protection for splashes? By what standards or protocols has the hospital determined that such supplies are adequate?
10. Does the facility have an adequate supply of N95s, N99s, halfmask and full facepiece elastomeric respirators, and powered air-purifying respirators? By what standards or protocols has the hospital determined that such supplies are adequate?
11. What is the process in place for medical screening, fit testing and training for respiratory protective equipment? Is screening, fit testing and training up-to-date?
12. Where is respiratory equipment located, and what measures is the employer taking to encourage its use?
13. What system is in place to ensure safety of injections, phlebotomy procedures and management of sharps? Please provide details of the system.
14. What is the procedure to ensure regular and rigorous environmental cleaning, decontamination of surfaces and equipment, and management of soiled linen and waste?
15. Will new chemical disinfectants be introduced into the workplace? If so, on what date will a new disinfectant be introduced, what is it, and will staff receive thorough training on its use?
16. What measures have been established for safe processing of laboratory samples from suspected or confirmed patients with Ebola? Please provide the details of these measures.
17. Has the facility established a process to ensure that the infection-prevention and -control measures are followed while handling dead bodies or human remains of suspected or confirmed patients with Ebola for post-mortem examination and burial preparation? If so, please provide the details of the process. If not, will such process be established, and when?
18. Is there a system in place to promptly evaluate, care for and, if necessary, isolate healthcare workers or any person exposed to blood or body fluids from suspected or confirmed patients with Ebola? If so, please provide the details of such system. If not, will such system be established, and when? Will potentially exposed workers placed on precautionary removal (isolation) be compensated?

For a variety of reasons, many employers shy away from discussions about health and safety issues in the healthcare workplace. With the likelihood of more Ebola cases surfacing in the healthcare setting, it is more important than ever for local leaders to insist on knowing the level of preparedness in the workplace and ensure that adequate protections are in place.

Quite simply, our members have the right to a workplace where adequate infection-control practices and PPE keep them safe from exposure to hazards like Ebola, and our labor laws obligate employers to discuss these matters. It is incumbent upon local leaders to engage in solution-driven dialogue with employers that will ensure patients and health professionals are protected from Ebola exposure in the workplace.

Be sure to check out our Ebola toolkit for more information about the virus and how to protect your workplace. For additional information, contact AFT Nurses and Health Professionals at 202-879-4400.