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Local Healthcare and Emergency Resources Work Together to Prepare for Ebola Challenge

Harrisonburg, VA - Although the risk of the Ebola virus spreading to Virginia may be low, local health care and emergency services providers are working together to ensure the community remains safe and is educated on the virus.

Recently, the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Emergency Management Task Force, which includes local first responders and representatives from Sentara RMH Medical Center, the Virginia Department of Health, colleges and universities, and public schools, met to discuss the virus and review the plans that have already been implemented.

"Each agency has its own set of protocols when dealing with any emergency-related event," said Larry Shifflett, Harrisonburg Fire Chief and the City's Coordinator of Emergency Management. "It is important for all agencies to work together and be familiar with these protocols so we can better anticipate one another's actions during a crisis."

Precautionary measures start with the 911 phone call to the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Emergency Communications Center or, if the patient is privately transported, with the initial screening at the Sentara RMH Medical Center Emergency Department. All first responders and health care providers are asking the same screening questions, as guided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to better assess the patient's symptoms and determine whether there is a risk for Ebola.

"Sentara RMH and emergency services personnel work very closely together every day to provide safe and seamless healthcare to the residents of our community," said Dale Carroll, MD, Sentara RMH Chief Medical Officer. "In collaboration with our community partners, we are properly training and preparing to identify high-risk individuals and provide exceptional care that keeps everyone safe. We are fortunate in this community to have a high caliber of emergency services personnel and community partners who put safety first. Working together we can identify, treat and prevent the spread of the Ebola virus if it comes to our community."

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As with any potential emergency situation, it is important for the community to be prepared, but more importantly, to stay informed of the latest accurate information. Additional information for the local community about the Ebola virus is available through the Virginia Department of Health at www.VDH.Virginia.gov/epidemiology/ebola. Sentara RMH is also posting current hospital-related Ebola preparedness information on its website, www.rmhonline.com.

Basic Facts on the Ebola virus:

- There are no confirmed cases of Ebola in Virginia.
- According to the CDC, Ebola is spread through direct contact with the blood or body fluids of a person who is sick with Ebola.
- According to the CDC, the virus is NOT spread through the air, water, or food.

What can you do to stay healthy and protect yourself?

- Wash your hands often with soap and water.
- Do not touch the blood or body fluids of people who are sick.
- Do not handle items that may have come in contact with a sick person's blood or body fluids, like clothes, bedding, needles, or medical equipment.

The Virginia Department of Health has also established a 24-hour hotline (**1-877-ASK-VDH3**) for patients with general questions to call.

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