Higher Education's Response to Ebola, Both Domestically and Abroad
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Over the last several months, the perception of Americans of the current Ebola outbreak has developed, and the initial panic has subsided as Americans have gained a better understanding of Ebola, and as more U.S. patients have survived infection.

Colleges and universities across the country remain concerned how Ebola could impact their communities and what measures should be taken, both short-term and long-term, to ensure the health and safety of students, faculty and staff by minimizing the risk of exposure to infectious diseases both on campus and abroad.

Institutional attention to the potential spread of Ebola is rooted in the unique challenges that these communities face to protect the public health and well-being. First, many institutions sponsor study abroad programs, including programs where students are sent to Ebola-affected countries or countries in close proximity to the current Ebola outbreak. Second, many institutions accept applications from foreign students to attend school in the U.S., including foreign students from effected countries in West Africa. Third, college campuses by their very nature put students, faculty, and staff in close proximity to each other, creating obvious challenges in containing a transmittable disease in the event of an infected individual on campus.

To assist member institutions in addressing these unique challenges, Waller has created the following FAQs as a quick guide and resource to supplement campus-preparedness measures in an ever-changing environment:

Is there guidance to assist college and university preparedness?

Yes. The CDC has published guidance for colleges, universities, and students to provide advice regarding frequent questions that relate to Ebola and Higher Ed. The CDC's guidance can be found here. Furthermore, several states, including Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and South Carolina, have published their own advisories for colleges and universities on how to minimize the risk of exposure and prevent the spread of the disease should a community member become infected. These advisories can be found on the respective state's Department of Health's websites.

What travel restrictions to countries directly impacted by Ebola have been recommended for colleges and universities?

The CDC recommends that students, faculty and staff avoid non-essential travel, including education-related travel, to Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone for the foreseeable future, and most likely through the spring semester. Some institutions have prohibited all campus sponsored or funded activities such as study abroad, research-based grant activity, research, internships, conferences and presentations, recruitment fairs, teaching, performances, recruiting or athletic competitions, and other travel to these countries. Other institutions have, in campus-wide advisories, strongly discouraged travel to these affected countries and hosting visitors from these countries.

What travel restrictions to other Western African Countries have been recommended for colleges and universities?

The CDC is not recommending that travel to other West African countries be curtailed, but suggests that those considering such travel monitor the situation regularly, since the Ebola outbreak could change rapidly.
How should a college or university evaluate the health status of returning students, faculty, or staff who have traveled to Western African Countries?

The CDC is not recommending isolation or quarantine for students or faculty based on travel history alone. However, the CDC does recommend that institutions conduct a risk assessment for individuals who have been in effected West African countries, and health monitoring for all individuals who have been in effected West African countries for 21 days following their return.

What specific guidance is out there for student health centers?

The CDC has provided specific guidance for student health centers, including:

- Isolate patients who may be infected in a private room with a separate bathroom.
- Follow proper infection control measures and utilize proper personal protective equipment.
- Notify local state health officials immediately of any suspected Ebola infections.

While Ebola preparedness and response resources develop for Higher Ed, institutions should, at a minimum, continue to identify potential travelers from impacted areas, conduct emergency drills and ensure that standard operating procedures at health centers are equipped to immediately and effectively respond to the presence of Ebola on campus, review business interruption policies, develop protocols to ensure coordination and cooperation between campus stakeholders, and continue to educate the community on Ebola and campus response procedures.

In addition to these measures, and due to the inherent risks of exposure that exist on campuses, institutions would be well-served to also assess the scope of coverage in their insurance programs and policies. Some carriers that previously covered medically-necessary evacuation protocols are now beginning to deny such coverage leaving the responsibility and cost of developing and executing such protocols to the insured. Similarly, other insurers have gone so far as to exclude all coverage for Ebola outbreaks. From a risk management perspective, these types of exclusions can have a significant impact on a school's bottom-line especially in an environment in which resources and funding sources continue to diminish.

If you have additional questions about this article, please contact the authors or any member of Waller. In addition, as part of the effort to educate different industries on responding to Ebola, Waller has developed a comprehensive online resource to help businesses navigate diverse issues pertaining to the arrival of the Ebola virus in the United States. That resource can be found at: https://www.ebolaresource.com/

Waller is pleased to have partnered with TICUA to bring you this series of Legal Notes. If you have questions or suggestions for future topics, please contact Claude Pressnell (pressnell@ticua.org) or Waverly D. Crenshaw, Jr. (waverly.crenshaw@wallerlaw.com).

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