

April 28, 2015 CDC Ebola Response Update

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Mark Davis] Today, we're talking about stigma, an unfortunate side effect of any disease outbreak. The current Ebola outbreak is no different.

I'm Mark Davis and here with us today to talk about stigma and how to fight it is Molly Gaines-McCollom, a CDC health communication specialist who has traveled to Guinea twice to fight Ebola.

[Molly Gaines-McCollom] Thanks, Mark. You know, stigma happens when people fear the unknown or something they don't understand and are afraid it will happen to them. Ebola is a scary disease. It's *completely* normal to feel worried or scared about something like Ebola. We've never seen an outbreak of Ebola this large, and the disease is still not well understood by most people.

Unfortunately, it's this lack of understanding and fear that can lead to stigma. Stigma can be anything that makes someone feel like they don't belong, like making a negative comment about someone, or treating someone differently when you're around them because you're scared they might have Ebola.

[Mark Davis] So what kind of impact can stigma have on people and their communities?

[Molly Gaines-McCollom] Stigma hurts people and communities who have already been hurt by the Ebola outbreak. It makes it harder for them to pull together in a time when they need to be strong to fight the disease.

In West Africa, Ebola survivors have been shunned because of fears that they can still spread the disease. Some have even been jailed. Many children orphaned by Ebola are left on their own because people are too scared to take them in.

Some of us who have traveled to West Africa to help fight the outbreak, experience stigma when we return home. Some of us have been told not to go to work or school or our families and friends have asked us not to attend parties and even holiday gatherings.

Just because someone is from West Africa or has traveled there, it doesn't mean they were exposed to Ebola or can spread the disease. We're doing a lot of work in West Africa, and here, to make sure that doesn't happen. We're teaching West Africans about Ebola and what they can do to protect themselves and their families, and we encourage communities to support their survivors.

Everyone leaving West Africa is screened to make sure they aren't sick before they board a plane, and then when they arrive in the U.S., they are screened again. After that, state health departments monitor every traveler for 21 days to make sure they don't develop symptoms of Ebola. We've also given hospitals new guidance and training to prepare for the remote possibility that they need to treat an Ebola patient.

[Mark Davis] Molly, why is it so important to fight stigma?

[Molly Gaines-McCollom] Well, fighting stigma can help us fight Ebola. Showing support and respect for those affected by Ebola, both in West Africa and in the U.S., makes communities stronger, better able to fight the outbreak, and quicker to heal. One of the best ways you can fight stigma is to know the facts and correct rumors and misinformation. Make sure all your information comes from a credible, trustworthy source.

So if you're worried or have questions, educate yourself about Ebola at cdc.gov/ebola.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.