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St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, the host city for this year's ASTMH meeting.

Been to an Ebola-affected country? Stay away from tropical medicine meeting, Louisiana says

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By [Martin Enserink \(/author/martin-enserink/\)](/author/martin-enserink/) | 29 October 2014 6:30 pm | [23 Comments \(/health/2014/10/been-ebola-affected-country-stay-away-tropical-medicine-meeting-louisiana-says#disqus_thread\)](#)

Ebola fears are interfering with the world's premier scientific meeting on tropical

diseases. Today, Louisiana state health officials asked anyone who has traveled to Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Guinea in the past 21 days, or has treated Ebola patients elsewhere, to stay away from the [annual meeting of the American Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene](http://www.astmh.org/Home.htm) (<http://www.astmh.org/Home.htm>) (ASTMH), which begins on Sunday in New Orleans.

ASTMH doesn't know exactly how many scientists will be affected, but there are several, says incoming president Christopher Plowe, including representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "They are quite disappointed," says Plowe, a malaria researcher at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore. ASTMH [sent all meeting registrants an e-mail today containing a letter](http://sherwood-astmh.informz.net/InformzDataService/OnlineVersion/Public?mailingInstanceId=4362069) (<http://sherwood-astmh.informz.net/InformzDataService/OnlineVersion/Public?mailingInstanceId=4362069>) from Kathy Kliebert, secretary of Louisiana's Department of Health and Hospitals, and Kevin Davis, director of the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, that outlines the state's position. ASTMH referred registrants to the state's health department for further information.

"Given that conference participants with a travel and exposure history for [Ebola] are recommended not to participate in large group settings (such as this conference) or to utilize public transport, we see no utility in you traveling to New Orleans to simply be confined to your room," the letter says.

Louisiana's new policy goes further than guidelines from CDC; it is the latest example, after New York and New Jersey, of a state deciding to impose restrictions that many scientists say make little sense.

"I'm very upset. And that's an understatement," says Piero Olliaro, a tropical diseases expert at WHO and a visiting professor at the University of Oxford in the United Kingdom, who learned this afternoon that he can't travel to New Orleans. Olliaro returned from Guinea on 22 October, where he had been scouting for sites to do clinical trials of candidate Ebola drugs. At the ASTMH meeting, he was scheduled to co-chair a session, give two talks, and present six posters. He says he's scrambling to find people to replace him.

"This policy is fundamentally flawed and not evidence-based," says Daniel Bausch, a researcher at the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine in New Orleans who is the organizer of [one of two specialized](#)

[Ebola symposia \(http://www.abstractsonline.com/Plan/ViewSession.aspx?mlID=1668&sKey=03f1520f-abd4-4d4a-8f94-f2530c3f954e&mKey=%7b52AE2426-7F12-4D2B-9404-C0D0B5A8EB5A%7d\)](http://www.abstractsonline.com/Plan/ViewSession.aspx?mlID=1668&sKey=03f1520f-abd4-4d4a-8f94-f2530c3f954e&mKey=%7b52AE2426-7F12-4D2B-9404-C0D0B5A8EB5A%7d)

at the meeting. "It's very unfortunate and could potentially be counterproductive by preventing health care workers from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea from sharing their experiences and findings at one of the most important tropical disease meetings globally," adds Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas.

Plowe says he made phone calls to state officials late into the night the past few days to get clarity on Louisiana's Ebola policy in time for this year's meeting. "The last thing we wanted was for people to travel to New Orleans only to find out that they will be quarantined for 21 days," he says. Louisiana has the right to make its own policies, Plowe says: "That's the way it is. We have to live with it." But ASTMH believes the best way to protect Americans is to fight Ebola in West Africa, he adds, and keeping away health care workers who have not been involved in patient care "is not helping to accomplish this, and ultimately puts Americans at higher risk," he says.

Just how to limit the spread of Ebola in the United States has become the topic of intense political debates in the middle of an election season. According to the complicated new interim guidelines from CDC [issued yesterday \(http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/exposure/monitoring-and-movement-of-persons-with-exposure.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/exposure/monitoring-and-movement-of-persons-with-exposure.html), people who have traveled to countries with widespread Ebola transmission but who did not come into direct contact with patients, are in the "low (but not zero) risk" category; the same is true for those who treated Ebola patients using appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) in countries that have seen just a few cases, such as the United States, Germany, or Spain. As long as they have no symptoms, such people can travel freely, and there is no reason to bar them from gatherings, CDC says.

People who treated Ebola patients using protective gear in Sierra Leone, Guinea, or Liberia fall into the "some risk" category, for which "direct active monitoring" is recommended, including daily temperature measurements by health officials; in addition, local authorities "may consider additional restrictions," CDC says. (The definitions of the various risk categories are [here \(http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/exposure/risk-factors-when-evaluating-person-for-exposure.html\)](http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/exposure/risk-factors-when-evaluating-person-for-exposure.html).)

That gives state authorities considerable leeway, and some have decided to take a strict position. In their letter, Kliebert and Davis say that the state wouldn't be able to determine the level of risk for any particular traveler; instead, it would have to rely on self-reporting. To err on the side of caution, Louisiana is asking even people who fall into CDC's "low (but not zero) risk" category to stay away. "In Louisiana, we love to welcome visitors, but we must balance that hospitality with the protection of Louisiana residents and other visitors," the letter says.

Kliebert and Davis appear to acknowledge that the ban does not make much sense scientifically, however. "From a medical perspective, asymptomatic individuals are not at risk of exposing others," they write. "These precautions are being taken out of an abundance of caution for the current situation, and certainly do not reflect a lack of appreciation for your service and sacrifice in efforts to treat and end the [Ebola] epidemic.

"Out of an abundance of caution ... I've come to hate that term," Bausch says. "It means it's not evidence-based, there's no science to support it, but we're going to do it anyway."

Olliaro says he didn't treat patients in Guinea but walked around Ebola treatment units in a protective suit; this would probably put him in CDC's "some risk" category. In the United Kingdom, by contrast, he is supposed to self-monitor, his travel isn't restricted, and he can go to meetings.

Bausch's session at the ASTMH meeting will be a [broad overview of the state of the epidemic \(http://www.abstractsonline.com/Plan/ViewSession.aspx?mID=1668&sKey=03f1520f-abd4-4d4a-8f94-f2530c3f954e&mKey=%7b52AE2426-7F12-4D2B-9404-C0D0B5A8EB5A%7d\)](http://www.abstractsonline.com/Plan/ViewSession.aspx?mID=1668&sKey=03f1520f-abd4-4d4a-8f94-f2530c3f954e&mKey=%7b52AE2426-7F12-4D2B-9404-C0D0B5A8EB5A%7d). Bausch has repeatedly traveled to West Africa himself, but not in the past 21 days; he's not sure if anyone in his panel has. Another session at the meeting will [focus on new drugs and vaccines \(http://www.abstractsonline.com/Plan/ViewSession.aspx?mID=1668&sKey=da9e0700-96f7-44e7-a3fb-83b20bebef01&mKey=%7b52AE2426-7F12-4D2B-9404-C0D0B5A8EB5A%7d%27\)](http://www.abstractsonline.com/Plan/ViewSession.aspx?mID=1668&sKey=da9e0700-96f7-44e7-a3fb-83b20bebef01&mKey=%7b52AE2426-7F12-4D2B-9404-C0D0B5A8EB5A%7d%27). ASTMH says it [will reimburse conference fees \(http://sherwood-astmh.informz.net/InformzDataService/OnlineVersion/Public?mailingInstanceId=4361797\)](http://sherwood-astmh.informz.net/InformzDataService/OnlineVersion/Public?mailingInstanceId=4361797) for registrants who decide to cancel their trip because of Louisiana's Ebola policy.

"We do hope that you will consider a future visit to New Orleans," Kliebert and Davis say at the end of their letter, "when we can welcome you appropriately."

The Ebola Files: Given the current Ebola outbreak, unprecedented in terms of number of people killed and rapid geographic spread, Science and Science Translational Medicine have made [a collection of research and news articles on the viral disease \(http://www.sciencemag.org/site/extra/ebola/\)](http://www.sciencemag.org/site/extra/ebola/) **freely available to researchers and the general public.*

Posted in [Health \(/category/health/\)](/category/health/), [Scientific Community \(/category/scientific-community/\)](/category/scientific-community/) [Ebola \(/tags/ebola/\)](/tags/ebola/)

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23 Comments

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Join the discussion...



Kevin Worldsavior · 5 months ago

I got the way to prevent the worldwide zombie apocalypse - Cure and Prevention of Ebola are by far more powerful than its spread - I got the power (and everybody can possess it) to wipe out Ebola, AIDS, T4 Bacteriophage, Malaria, Dengue, Cholera, TB, Polio, Colds, Flues, etc. in just a few days - I got my WVD - The Weapon of Virus Destruction - Just an exercise for a minute a day - The cure and prevention of any diseases, known on Earth for more than 2 million years - Infections, Cancers, Diabetes and Strokes - Even Tibetans and Yoga don't know how to stay absolutely healthy all the time - The price of the WVD for the whole world is 5 billion EURO/BUCKS/BP - Especially dangerous is the T4 Bacteriophage virus, already set in the wild and planned to be shot by mandatory vaccines (as Ebola cure and prevention), but hatched to alter the human DNA of generations to come and turn them into zombies, i.e. to destroy its recipients - Only my WVD can save everybody from the imminent zombie apocalypse, for that critter of a virus will be killed the moment it gets into our blood stream.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Unwelcome guest · 8 months ago

Could somebody please take down the "Idiots Welcome" sign???

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ha · 8 months ago

And 'moderate risk' asymptomatic individuals are subject to the CDC's limitations such as...

"Non-congregate public activities while maintaining a 3-foot distance from others may be permitted (e.g., jogging in a park)

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Skepticism equally applied → Ha · 7 months ago

Your point is off base. "Moderate risk" is higher risk than these attendees.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ha · 8 months ago

A 'low risk' person who spikes a fever (for any reason, ie flu) per CDC policy gets.

"Implement rapid isolation with immediate contact of public health authorities to arrange for safe transport to an appropriate healthcare facility for Ebola evaluation

Medical evaluation is required.

Isolation orders may be used to ensure compliance

Air travel is permitted only by air medical transport"

All of their contacts then have to be monitored and their rooms decontaminated.

Why do certain health officials have such a cavalier attitude to such a deadly, biosafety level 4, virus?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Skepticism equally applied → Ha · 7 months ago

It is not a cavalier attitude. The reality is that people with no symptoms are not risks for transmitting the virus. The "low risk" category with fever is higher risk than the people who were denied attendance at this meeting.

More significantly, the ability to fight this epidemic is hindered by interfering with this meeting. That puts us at a higher risk.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ha · 8 months ago


Perhaps this 'doctor' should retire if he does not take science seriously?

"term," Bausch says. "It means it's not evidence-based, there's no science to support it, but we're going to do it anyway."

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Skepticism equally applied → Ha · 8 months ago

 If you are referring to the Louisiana appointees who are supposed to protect health then you have a point. If you are attempting to criticize Bausch then it is not a good criticism. He is stating the obvious. The politically imposed policy of banning these low risk ("some" risk per CDC criteria) scientists from attending is not based on science.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ha · 8 months ago

CDC policy... "

Asymptomatic individuals in the high risk category should have direct active monitoring for 21 days after the last potential exposure. The individual should be ensured, through public health orders as necessary, to undergo direct active monitoring, have restricted movement within the community, and not travel on any public conveyances. Non-congregate public activities while maintaining a 3-foot distance from others may be permitted. These individuals are subject to controlled movement which will be enforced by federal public health travel restrictions; travel, if allowed, should occur only by noncommercial conveyances, with coordination by origin and destination states to ensure a coordinated hand-off of public health orders, if issued, and uninterrupted direct active monitoring."

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Skepticism equally applied → Ha · 8 months ago

If you read the article you will notice that the reason the attendees are upset is that they are NOT high risk individuals.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ha · 8 months ago

Rubbish. The Louisiana policy is the same as the Federal policy. What a bunch of unscientific, irresponsible journalism !

The CDC has a 21 day quarantine program. The participants are not supposed to self quarantine.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Skepticism equally applied → Ha · 8 months ago

That is absolutely false. The Louisiana policy treats all patients as being high risk which is completely different.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



mmc123 · 8 months ago

This is a quibble I have with a lot of reporting but it bugs me: you link to the ASTMH conference site, you link to the conference abstracts, you link to the CDC guidelines, which is all well and good, but you don't link to a PDF of the letter the story is about. Please include links to source material when possible. Thanks.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



mmc123 · 8 months ago



Martin mmc123 · 8 months ago

The links have been added.

| · Reply · Share ›



Ottar Stensvold · 8 months ago

This could also be relevant for Ebola, which also is a single-stranded RNA virus:

HIV vaccine

The body's initial "vaccine-reaction" against HIV could be prolonged if the viruses were inactivated. In comparison, the poliovirus can be inactivated by cleavage of its RNA by ammonia. Hopefully, the same can be true for HIV. Both viruses contain single-stranded RNA and hydrolytic proteases. Maybe the proteases perform (catalyse) aminolysis of the phosphodiester bonds in RNA, and so cut the strands. HIV has even RNase H which is specialized in breaking RNA strands.

The phosphorus/phosphate (PO₄⁻) in RNA repels water more than ammonia, and is thus favoring aminolysis over hydrolysis. (NH₃ is a stronger nucleophile and a slightly smaller molecule than H₂O).

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pm...>

The tight encapsulation/packing of RNA in the viruses will probably promote the aminolysis process. The hydrophobic cores in the ribonucleoproteins will attract ammonia.

(The Ebola viruses are extra prone to breakage during mechanical stress in vivo because of

[see more](#)

| · Reply · Share ›



Skepticism equally applied Ottar Stensvold · 8 months ago

Ottar,

I can't tell whether you are serious. I will assume for argument's sake that you are. Inhaling ammonia has serious negative consequences as any google search should tell you. It is also not a generally effective approach to bathe your entire system in a base (or acid) in order to kill a virus.

| · Reply · Share ›



bwingirl Ottar Stensvold · 8 months ago

An African doctor already found a cure for Ebola. He tried it on his patients, even though it wasn't standard protocol. It's an antiviral used by AIDs?HIV patients.

Can't remember the stupid name of it, but it does cure Ebola. At least in Africa.

1 | · Reply · Share ›



Boganboy · 8 months ago

This is what happens when rubbish like the 'precautionary principle' is invented. People start taking it seriously, and don't just accept that it's just the necessary excuse to rob them of

their money to carry out someone else's agenda. You'll note that the ASTMH feels that something should be done about foreigners in West Africa, although when it harasses or annoys them, they certainly don't think any precautions should be taken to protect Americans from the disease. The facts are that the chance of a serious ebola outbreak in the US is very low, so there is no reason for Americans to display any concern whatsoever for the people of West Africa. As always, the do-gooders are creating a panic to achieve their aims, and then complaining when people react to the panic instead of carrying out their desires.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Skepticism equally applied → Boganboy · 8 months ago

The do-gooders are the people in the medical and research communities. The people creating the panic are journalists.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Uncle AI · 8 months ago

The US government is a clown car of corruption, fueled by an alphabet soup of agencies' incompetence, disgorging epizootics of Beltway lobotomites and diversity hires. Locally, former Louisiana Gov. Edwin Edwards was sentenced to 10 years in prison and fined \$250,000 today for racketeering and extortion. Clarence Ray Nagin, Jr., was mayor of New Orleans, Louisiana from 2002 to 2010, now serving ten years on twenty charges of wire fraud, bribery, and money laundering.

Everybody suits up and attends the conference. Local police affections lease cheaply. If Ebola gets loose, everybody goes to the Superdome. Bring your own TP (and a bucket, re Hurricane Karina).

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Gadfly → Uncle AI · 8 months ago

Your emails are a clown car of prejudices and techno-babble.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Uncle AI → Gadfly · 8 months ago

Doug, couldn't you at least have cribbed something pretentious from the Web as reply? Latin is good, so are Pashto and Hangul.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Gadfly → Uncle AI · 8 months ago

I could never compete with you, the master! Ever think of entering a techno-babble contest? You would have no competition.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

controversial telescope in Hawaii

45 comments • a day ago

Uncle AI — The very highest priority is removal of three University of Hawaii telescopes. Wholly end the university, ...

Research chimps will soon be listed as 'endangered'

1 comment • 4 days ago

Uncle AI — Breed them as "privileged minorities," then celebrate "diversity" to be up to your chumps in chimps: 1) Pay ...

thermometers

1 comment • 3 days ago

Uncle AI — Given the minuscule mass of the diamond sensor and the total energy delivered by the laser pulse to the ...

Scientists renew objections to Japan's whaling program

1 comment • 3 days ago

zlop — Instead of fighting the climate, save the Whales. Japanese can eat seaweed instead.

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