Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) today announced four leading Chicago hospitals have agreed to form a network of resource centers that are preparing to provide care in the unlikely event of a patient being diagnosed with Ebola in Chicago. The four hospitals – Rush University Medical Center and the University of Chicago Medical Center for adult and pediatric patients, Northwestern Memorial Hospital for adult patients and Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago for pediatric patients – agreed to serve in this capacity following a series of meetings with Mayor Emanuel and CDPH officials.

“Even though the chances of an individual being diagnosed in Chicago are still extremely unlikely, we are doing everything we can to ensure our City is prepared to respond quickly and effectively,” said Mayor Emanuel. “Chicago is home to world-class hospitals and providers, and I am grateful to these institutions for stepping up for our City and our nation.”

More than two months ago, the City of Chicago began working directly with local hospitals and providers to make the necessary preparations for the unlikely scenario. As part of these efforts, Mayor Emanuel convened a meeting between cabinet members, public health officials and hospital leaders to discuss the benefits of identifying a network of providers that has made intensive preparations as part of a City-wide readiness effort. Today’s news is an outcome of that meeting.

“Chicago is strong and knows how to work together to get things done,” said CDPH Commissioner Bechara Choucair, M.D. “By creating a network of providers, we are going above and beyond national guidelines to ensure that our City remains healthy and safe from infectious disease.”

In the unlikely event someone is suspected of having Ebola – either at a local healthcare provider or by first responders – CDPH will work to ensure the patient is kept in isolation following CDC protocols, that blood samples are routed appropriately for immediate testing and that the patient is transferred, in isolation, to one of the four hospitals to ensure the greatest care possible, following updated guidelines and protocols from the CDC.

As part of the City’s preparedness efforts, CDC infectious disease specialists are in Chicago this week conducting an audit for the hospitals, determining what updates or additional trainings could be implemented to further augment the hospital’s abilities to serve these roles.

To help ensure all providers are prepared, CDPH has worked directly with other area hospitals and health care providers over the past several weeks, leading regular briefings to ensure CDC recommendations are implemented and that hospitals and healthcare providers are providing the necessary training to staff. CDPH continues to provide advice and guidance for healthcare providers preparing for possible scenarios and to facilitate sharing of hospital-specific protocols.
In addition to their work with hospitals, CDPH has worked closely with other City Agencies as part of the City’s overall preparedness efforts. This work includes:

- Participating in ongoing CDC calls regarding contact tracing issues – with prepared documents to track contacts and working to have thermometers ready for twice daily temperature checks.
- Provided updated training to EMS and other first responders to reaffirm proper safety procedures for infectious diseases.
- Coordinated with the Chicago Fire Department to modify 911 scripts to include questions on travel history to affected areas, in order to ensure appropriate response from first responders. Dispatchers have been trained on updates.
- Outreach to community organizations — particularly those in Chicago’s West African communities — to make health professionals available to address any questions or concerns.
- Created and disseminated a fact sheet for residents, including information on transmission and symptoms and translating the fact sheet into Spanish, Polish, Chinese, French and Tagalog.
- Worked closely with the Chicago Department of Aviation and CDC to review and implement airport screenings for inbound passengers residing in or traveling from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone — the nations hardest hit by Ebola. The new screening procedures were implemented at O’Hare, as well as Atlanta, Newark, New York City and Dulles airports.
  - Together, these airports account for roughly 94% of inflow from these three nations. O’Hare airport sees about 10-20 passengers/day from these nations.
- Deployed CDPH-CDC assignees to O’Hare Quarantine Station to assist in screenings.
- Developed and distributed guidance to local Colleges and Universities preparing for handling an unlikely case.