

Beat: Health

American doctor with Ebola arrives in U.S. for treatment

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USPA News - An American doctor, who became infected with the deadly Ebola virus while treating victims of an outbreak in West Africa, arrived in the United States on Saturday to receive treatment at a hospital in Atlanta, officials said. A second Ebola patient is expected to arrive next week.

Dr. Kent Brantly, 33, was flown on board a medical evacuation plane equipped with a special containment unit from Liberia to Dobbins Air Reserve Base in Marietta, Georgia. A special ambulance - driven by a man wearing a hazmat suit - took Brantly to Emory University Hospital in Atlanta. Video from news helicopters following the ambulance on its 20-mile (32-kilometer) ride to Emory University Hospital showed Brantly being assisted and holding the hands of a worker as he slowly walked from the ambulance into the back of the hospital, where an isolation unit has been set up in collaboration with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Both were wearing hazmat suits. Robert Earley, CEO and president at JPS Health Network, where Brantly completed his residency just months before heading to West Africa, said the organization was "delighted" to see Brantly's return to the United States. "We are very grateful for the courage and stamina of the team who went to get him," he said. "We are grateful to the staff at Emory who will care for him." The plane that brought Brantly to the United States left Dobbins Air Reserve Base on Saturday afternoon to return to Liberia to pick up American missionary Nancy Writebol, who was serving on a joint team with Brantly when they both contracted the virus. Brantly is affiliated with international relief organization Samaritan's Purse, while Writebol is with Christian mission organization SIM. "We thank God that they are alive and now have access to the best care in the world," said Franklin Graham, who is the president of Samaritan's Purse. "We are extremely thankful for the help we have received from the State Department, the CDC, the National Institute of Health, WHO and, of course, Emory Hospital." Brantly's condition was previously described as "grave," but his current condition is unknown, although observers described Brantly's brief walk from the ambulance into Emory Hospital as an encouraging sign. Writebol remains in a serious, but stable condition, according to SIM representatives. "We remain encouraged by Nancy's condition, and we can't wait to have her back home," said Bruce Johnson, president of SIM USA. Writebol's husband, David, is expected to travel back to the United States separately to be near his wife when she arrives in Atlanta early next week. Brantly's arrival in the United States makes him the first ever Ebola patient on U.S. soil, though four people were infected with the Reston Ebola virus in 1990 after infected monkeys from the Philippines were introduced into quarantine facilities in Virginia and Texas. The Reston virus is a mutation from the Ebola virus and does not cause illness in humans. The current outbreak in West Africa features the Zaire strain of the Ebola virus, which is considered the most aggressive and deadly strain, having killed up to 9 out of 10 infected in previous outbreaks. With now 1,323 suspected and confirmed cases in the region, including 729 deaths, the outbreak is the worst ever of its kind. American officials have emphasized there is little to no risk that Brantly's treatment in Atlanta could cause the virus to spread in the United States. "Every precaution is being taken to move the patients safely and securely, to provide critical care en-route on a non-commercial aircraft, and to maintain strict isolation upon arrival in the United States," said U.S. State Department spokeswoman Marie Harf. Emory University Hospital has also downplayed any fears of a U.S. outbreak, saying its specially trained staff practice procedures to treat patients with serious infectious diseases regularly. Brantly and Writebol will also remain in areas that provide "extraordinary high levels" of clinical isolation, away from other patient areas. Ebola is a highly infectious disease and kills its victims in a very short time, but those who survive the disease can no longer transfer it to others once the symptoms disappear. The virus, for which there is no cure or vaccine, can spread through direct contact with body fluids such as saliva, blood, stool, vomit, urine, and sweat, but also through soiled linen used by an infected person. It can also spread by using skin piercing instruments previously used by an infected person or by touching the body of a person who died of Ebola. It is not airborne. The first outbreak of Ebola in 1976 in Zaire - which is now the Democratic Republic of Congo - had been the deadliest until the current outbreak, killing at least 280 people and sickening 38 others, putting the fatality rate at 88 percent. The Ebola outbreak in Uganda in 2000 had long been the largest ever recorded, killing 224 people and sickening at least 201 others.

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