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South Central Public Health and the CSI Refugee Center Address Ebola Stigma Associated With Area Refugees

TWIN FALLS-Refugees come to the Magic Valley area in search of a new life, but right now some are being met with hostility and concern due to stigma from the Ebola outbreaks in West Africa.

“None of our refugees are from West Africa; they are no more likely to have Ebola than anyone else living in this area. Every refugee goes through several rigorous medical screenings before they can enter into the United States,” said Ron Black, College of Southern Idaho (CSI) Refugee Center Director. “The medical screening and waiting period they go through is longer and more intense than any protocol used for ordinary travelers. Plus, most CSI refugees arrived years before the Ebola outbreak.”

Stigma is happening in the Magic Valley due to several factors including myths and fears of the disease, gossip that helps spread the fear, and a lack of knowledge about how Ebola is actually spread.

“A person who does not have Ebola symptoms cannot spread the disease. Ebola can only be spread by direct contact with blood or body fluids of a person diagnosed with Ebola.” says Cheryle Becker, South Central Public Health District Family and Children’s Health Administrator.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is asking public health, hospitals, and other medical providers to counter the stigma by raising awareness, sharing accurate information about how the disease is spread, and communicating the lack of risk from associations with certain people, products, or places.

“This is a daunting time for everyone, especially our refugees. We ask that the community show empathy and most importantly remember that no one in this area, let alone the state of Idaho, has been diagnosed with Ebola.” said Ron Black, CSI Refugee Center Director.

For more information on Ebola and ways to help stop the stigma, visit ebola.idaho.gov .

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