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State of Illinois Teams with Rush and Lurie Children's to Establish Elite Special Pathogen Treatment Centers

IDPH Providing Two Hospitals \$1.5 million to Upgrade Capacity to Treat Patients Infected With High-Consequence Pathogens

SPRINGFIELD – Governor JB Pritzker announced today that the State of Illinois has teamed up with two leading Chicago Hospitals – Rush University Medical Center and the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago – to serve as Elite Special Pathogen Treatment Centers for "High-Consequence Pathogens."

Under two agreements with the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), the hospitals will upgrade their capacity to treat people suffering from high-consequence pathogens. The term refers to highly infectious diseases that pose a threat to public safety, such as such Ebola virus, Lassa fever and pneumonic plague. The agreement with the two world-class, Chicago-based healthcare leaders is one of a series of steps that IDPH is taking to strengthen its global surveillance efforts in the wake of the federal government pulling out of the World Health Organization (WHO) and cutting funding for the US Department of Health and Human Services.

"Here in Illinois, we're working to ensure our state is prepared to protect the health and safety of working families, even as the Trump administration decimates our national healthcare infrastructure," **said Governor JB Pritzker**. "I'm proud to announce IDPH's partnership with Rush and Lurie Children's to stop the spread of highly infectious diseases and treat those suffering from the most dangerous infections. With this investment, we're advancing treatment capabilities in two of our State's premier hospitals and ensuring the best care for Illinoisans."

Under the agreement, Rush will receive \$900,000 in state funding from IDPH; Lurie Children's will receive \$600,000. The state funding will help the hospitals maintain airborne infection isolation rooms, invest in specialized equipment and provide enhanced training for their medical staff to deliver safe and effective care to those infected with High-Consequence Pathogens.

"Rush University Medical Center has a long track record of readiness for emerging infectious diseases that threaten our state," **said Dr. Brian Stein, Chief Quality Officer for the Rush University System for Health**. "While our preparedness was tested and proven during the COVID-19 pandemic, this work began well before—with our involvement in the Chicago Ebola Response Network and with years of infection prevention innovation through the CDC-funded Prevention Epicenters Program. These partnerships have helped us build the infrastructure and expertise

needed to respond to public health emergencies. We are grateful for this vote of confidence from the state of Illinois.”

“It is part of our mission to be continuously prepared to safely serve the medical needs of any child who needs our care, no matter their disease,” says **Dr. Larry Kociolek, Pediatric Infectious Diseases specialist and Vice President of System Preparedness, Prevention, and Response at Lurie Children’s**. “This generous investment by the state ensures that all Illinois children can count on us to have the resources, tools, and highly trained staff that they need for high-consequence pathogen treatment at a moment’s notice.”

The federal government maintains a national network of 13 [Regional Emerging Special Pathogen Treatment Centers \(RESPTCs\)](#), but there are none in Illinois; the closest are in Michigan and Minnesota. While these centers are equipped to identify, isolate, and treat patients with severe infectious diseases like Ebola virus, transporting Illinois residents out of state to receive this specialized care is both logistically and clinically challenging.

“It is now, more important than ever, to build Illinois’s capacity to respond to current and future global health threats,” said **IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra**. “Chicago is a global city, home to O’Hare International Airport, the second busiest airport in the United States and a primary point of entry for international travelers. We are fortunate in Illinois to have some of the top hospitals and providers in the nation. IDPH is thrilled to partner with Rush and Lurie Children’s to protect the public from any and all high consequence pathogens that may enter Illinois.”

Director Vohra noted that the state is taking a series of steps to upgrade its capacity to monitor overseas health threats. This includes creation of a Global Health Advisory Coalition composed of Illinois healthcare leaders and the acquisition of customized reports on global disease surveillance from [BlueDot](#), a service that uses machine learning to track infectious diseases.

The CDC provides guidelines for how to respond to high-consequence pathogens that include the use of airborne infection isolation rooms, engineering controls and environmental control protocols, as well as ongoing and just-in-time intensive training for healthcare personnel to ensure the safety of personnel and the patient.

Under the agreements with Rush and Lurie Children’s, the two hospitals will be required to maintain the capacity to each simultaneously treat at least two patients with a high-consequence pathogen. This includes maintaining appropriate triage and transfer protocols with other local hospitals, specialized rooms and equipment, and appropriately trained staff.

Any outbreak of these special pathogens within Illinois would require a swift and decisive response from IDPH and local public health and healthcare partners. Even the management of a single case, from the standpoint of a public health response, would have state, regional and perhaps national implications. This underscores the critical need to build capacity to respond to current and future threats. IDPH’s partnership with these hospitals is an important step in keeping Illinois safe and prepared.

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