

Thursday, February 26, 2026

## REGION 2 RESPTC PARTNER COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

The Region 2 RESPTC at NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue serves as a National Special Pathogen System (NSPS) Level 1 facility and leads special pathogen preparedness efforts for New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Learn more about RESPTC updates, resources, and partner events [here](#).



*Representatives from all ten Region 2 NSPS Level 2 facilities and their public health partners at the Region 2 STAND Symposium this month.*

## OUTBREAK AND SPECIAL PATHOGEN NEWS

### Lassa Fever in Nigeria

As of [mid-February 2026](#), the Benue State reported 8 confirmed cases and 4 deaths, the Plateau State reported 11 confirmed cases and 4 deaths, and the Taraba state reported 49 cases and 15 deaths. In 2025, the Nigeria Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) recorded 1148 confirmed [cases of Lassa Fever](#), with a national case fatality rate of 18.7%. Ondo, Bauchi, Edo, and Taraba states accounted for 89% of all confirmed cases in 2025. The incidence of cases is typically higher during the dry season from December to April. Early symptoms of Lassa Fever can be similar to other febrile illnesses prevalent in the region, such as malaria and typhoid fever. Transmission is primarily through direct contact with the urine or feces of infected rodents. Person-to-person transmission can also occur in health care settings lacking adequate infection prevention and control measures. Guidance on infection prevention and control measures in clinical setting can be found [here](#).

### Nipah Virus in India and Bangladesh

On February 3, [Bangladesh confirmed their first case](#) of Nipah virus for 2026. All 35 contacts tested negative for Nipah virus as of early February. In 2025, four laboratory-confirmed cases and all fatal were reported from Bangladesh.

In India, of two reported cases of laboratory-confirmed Nipah virus among healthcare worker, one patient died on February 12th, bringing the case fatality rate for this cluster to 50%. The second confirmed case recovered and was discharged in early February. There are [no additional confirmed or suspected cases](#) of Nipah virus in India and all monitored contacts have tested negative. In 2025, India reported [4 confirmed cases](#) and 2 deaths.

Symptoms of Nipah virus infection can include fever, myalgias and vomiting, followed by encephalitis and/or worsening respiratory symptoms. Transmission typically occurs through raw date palm sap or fruit contaminated by an infected bat. Person-to-person spread in healthcare settings can pose additional risks. Guidance on infection prevention and control measures in clinical setting can be found [here](#).

## RESOURCE HIGHLIGHTS & UPCOMING EVENTS

### Project ECHO Healthcare Preparedness Virtual Learning Sessions for HHS Region 2

NYC H+H/Bellevue Hospital is launching a series of virtual Project ECHO learning sessions and conversations to engage audiences of public health practitioners, emergency managers, healthcare organizations, and community-based organizations to co-design equitable, coordinated, and resilient emergency preparedness and response systems. If you are interested in learning more about this initiative and would like to implement topics, please fill out this [form](#). **Upcoming sessions will discuss FIFA World Cup preparedness topics.**

### February Travel Screening Country List

The New York City Health + Hospitals/Bellevue Travel Screening List reviews current special pathogen disease outbreaks that require prompt identification, isolation and/or specialized evaluation and management. The Bellevue Special Pathogens Program team develops this list in partnership with colleagues at NYU, Toronto University Health Network, and the Japan Institute for Health Security. This list, which may be found [here](#), can serve as a resource while screening patients.

### Current Infectious Disease Outbreaks for New York City Providers

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (NYC DOHMH) offers a list of current infectious disease outbreaks as a resource for healthcare providers in New York City. Find the resource [here](#).

## REGION 2 NEWS

### 2025 Annual Report

The Region 2 RESPTC 2025 Annual Report can be found [here](#).

In 2025, the Region 2 RESPTC at Bellevue's Special Pathogens Program:

- Expanded Special Pathogen Unit (SPU) capacity and staffing, including a **56% increase in staffing capacity**.
- Created a patient visitation protocol to allow family members to safely visit the SPU, making **Bellevue the first RESPTC in the country** with this option for families.

- Led four exercises/drills, including a World Cup tabletop engaging **40+ organizations** and a full-scale exercise on experimental therapeutic agent delivery and consent.
- Participated the Tranquil Passport Full Scale Exercise (FSE), testing the Region 2 HCID Patient Transport CONOPs and Bellevue's ability to accept pediatric HCID patients.
- Bolstered Special Pathogen Response Team (SPRT) capabilities to ensure a team of trained Advanced Practice Providers are ready to support all eleven NYC H+H facilities with HCID activations.
- Supported regional readiness by distributing resources to **1,250+ partners**, maintaining a 25+ expert advisory group, hosting webinars for 350+ attendees, and responding to 20+ technical assistance requests.
- Collaborated with FIFA, NJDOH, and NYCDOHMH to prepared for the FIFA World Cup.
- Provided technical assistance to NYSDOH to support the development of special pathogen EMS capacity.
- Helped expand national HLIU capacity through NETEC by awarding **54 new Level 2 SPTCs**, including **10 in Region 2**, the highest regional total nationwide.
- Trained **500+ healthcare workers**, including **240+ in-person** and **250+ virtual**, with **97%+ satisfaction** among surveyed trainees.
- Established **2 international MOUs** (South Korea and Japan) and created a global outbreak monitoring list.
- Produced **9 manuscripts**, led **5 conference presentations**, and participated in **3 NETEC research collaborations**.

Planned 2026 activities include:

- Training healthcare facilities near FIFA World Cup event sites on how to identify and treat patients with special pathogens
- Offering free secret shopper drills to facilities across HHS Region 2
- Onboarding ten new NSPS Level 2 SPTCs to increase HLIU bed capacity in the region
- Deploying the SPRT, in partnership with NYCDOHMH, for at-home sample collection
- Launching a Project ECHO virtual learning series for regional partners

### **Region 2 Level 2 STAND Awardees Celebrate at In-Person Symposium**

NYC Health + Hospitals / Bellevue hosted all 10 new NSPS Level 2 facilities in HHS Region 2 for an in-person symposium in February. The event welcomed 45+ in-person and 20 virtual attendees from Level 2 facilities to discuss how to protect our communities from special pathogen threats. The 10 Level 2 SPTC awardees in Region 2 include:

- Cooper University Hospital (New Jersey)
- Good Samaritan University Hospital (New York)
- NYC Health + Hospitals | Elmhurst (NYC)
- NYC Health + Hospitals | Harlem (NYC)
- NYC Health + Hospitals | Jacobi (NYC)
- Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (New Jersey)
- Saratoga Hospital (New York)
- Schneider Regional Medical Center (USVI)
- Stony Brook University Hospital (New York)
- University of Rochester (New York)

Congratulations again to all awardees on this incredible accomplishment!



## R2RESPTC Continues Global Collaboration with Japan

The R2RESPTC Team is continuing to build an international network dedicated to sharing information and resources to enhance global special pathogen preparedness. In January, three delegates from the Japan Institute for Health Security (JIHS) visited NYC Health + Hospitals / Bellevue to observe our special pathogens training program. In early February, four representatives from the R2RESPTC team traveled to Tokyo for a training session hosted by JIHS.

## OUTBREAK ADVISORIES AND RESOURCES

### Lassa Fever

Lassa fever is primarily found in West Africa and is spread through exposure to rats.

Symptoms typically occur within 1 to 3 weeks after infection and can include:

- fever,
- headache,
- bleeding,
- difficulty breathing,
- vomiting,
- facial swelling,
- pain in the chest, back, and abdomen, and
- shock

### Resources

- [CDC Lassa Fever guidance](#)

### H5N1 Avian Influenza

Providers should consider the possibility of H5N1 in patients who had contact with potentially infected sick or dead animals in the past week and show the following symptoms:

- fever,
- cough,
- sore throat,
- body aches,
- headaches,
- fatigue,
- eye redness (or conjunctivitis), and/or

- shortness of breath

Source: [CDC](#)

Providers should report any non-sub typeable influenza A cases to their Department of Health.

### Resources

- [Region 2 RESPTC H5N1 Avian Influenza Webinar Recording](#)
- CDC HAN | [Accelerated Subtyping of Influenza A in Hospitalized Patients](#)
- [NETEC Influenza A Resource Repository](#)
- [NETEC Webinar Series \(8/14/2024\): H5N1 Town Hall: Updates for Frontline Staff](#)
- NETEC [Laboratory Resources: Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza \(HPAI\)](#)
- CDC [Bird Flu News and Spotlights](#)
- [NYC and NYS DOH health advisory on Influenza A subtyping](#)

### New York State Reporting

To report sick or dead poultry in New York State, call the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets at [518-457-3502](#).

### PARTNER COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT | NYC HEALTH + HOSPITALS | ELMHURST

*In the coming months, the R2RESPTC newsletter will spotlight recent NSPS Level 2 awardees in our region. Our February spotlight is NYC Health + Hospitals | Elmhurst!*



*A part of the Elmhurst Special Pathogen Treatment Program team: from left to right, Andrea Maldonado, Program Manager; Laura Iavicoli, Program Director; Allison Lockwood, Emergency Medicine SME; Josy Lamour, Infection Prevention SME; Grace-Ann Lautato-Weick, Lab/Ancillary Lead; Maloree Baxter-Williams, Nursing Education; Alexandra Lahm, Emergency Management SME*

Located at the doorstep of the world's busiest global gateways—JFK, LaGuardia, and Newark—NYC Health + Hospitals/Elmhurst serves as a critical clinical sentinel for a high-density population of over 500,000 residents. Building on a decade of experience as a frontline defense for early identification and containment, Elmhurst is aggressively scaling its foundation to become a federally recognized Level 2 Special Pathogen Treatment Center (SPTC). This transition shifts the hospital's focus from initial emergency stabilization to providing comprehensive, prolonged care for High-Consequence Infectious Diseases (HCIDs), establishing the facility as a permanent regional hub.

### Advanced Operational Capabilities

As a Level 2 SPTC, Elmhurst will maintain the readiness to accept HCID patients within four hours of notification. The facility features dedicated High-Level Isolation Units (HLIUs)

capable of managing viral hemorrhagic fevers and respiratory pathogens in specialized airborne infection isolation rooms. Supported by the system-wide NYC Health + Hospitals Biopreparedness Program, Elmhurst leverages advanced diagnostics, including the BioFire FilmArray PCR System, and dedicated biocontainment infrastructure for safe specimen processing and Category A waste decontamination. Specialized clinical workflows further ensure the safe treatment of vulnerable populations, including pediatric and OB/GYN patients.

### **A Multidisciplinary, Expert Team**

The program's success is driven by a specialized Core Team that bridges high-level policy with frontline clinical excellence. Strategic governance is led by Program Director Laura Iavicoli, MD, MBA (Elmhurst CMO), who provides executive oversight, alongside Program Manager Andrea Maldonado, JD, MA, MPA, CCMP, who directs day-to-day operations and timeline management. Syra Madad, DHSc, MSc, H+H System-wide Chief Biopreparedness Officer, ensures all protocols align with national technical guidance.

Operational readiness is maintained by a diverse bench of subject matter experts:

- Clinical & ICU Operations: Dr. Alfred Astua (ICU Inpatient Lead) and Dr. Allison Lockwood (Emergency Medicine) manage the transition from triage to long-term critical care.
- Simulation & Training: Dr. Suzanne Bentley and Dr. Danny Lugassy lead advanced simulation curricula and in-situ drills to validate staff competency.
- Nursing & Education: Maloree Baxter-Williams and Keira Wickliffe Berger standardize PPE competencies and respiratory surveillance.
- Safety & Infrastructure: Josy Lamour (Infection Prevention) and Grace-Ann Lautato-Weick (Lab/Ancillary Lead) embed rigorous biosafety compliance into every workflow.
- Emergency Management: Alexandra Lahm ensures seamless integration into city, state, and federal emergency frameworks.

Through this expert leadership and comprehensive infrastructure, Elmhurst Hospital stands as a permanent, sustainable shield against emerging global health threats for the community and the broader HHS Region 2 network.

### **WHAT'S NEW ON THE REGION 2 RESPTC WEBSITE?**

The Region 2 RESPTC website is a one-stop shop for all things related to special pathogen preparedness and response in New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The team has updated the [Tools and Resource page](#) with new resources including the latest Travel Screening List and resources dedicated to the H5N1 response. You can also read or re-read past newsletter issues [here](#).

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