Nebraska Biocontainment Unit – History & Timeline

March 2004 – The unit concept was developed by Philip Smith, M.D., who was serving as chair of the University of Nebraska Medical Center Section of Infectious Diseases, and approved by Richard Raymond, M.D., former chief medical officer of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The unit was built in 2004-2005 and funded by the state health department, with a cost of about $750,000. The Nebraska Medical Center donated floor space for the unit.

About the Unit

March 2005 – The Biocontainment Unit was officially opened by Julie Gerberding, M.D., former director of the CDC, under the leadership of former UNMC Chancellor Harold M. Maurer, M.D., and Glenn Fosdick, former president and CEO of The Nebraska Medical Center. The unit was a collaboration between UNMC, The Nebraska Medical Center (now Nebraska Medicine) and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Smith, UNMC professor of infectious diseases, serves as the medical director of the unit.

- The 10-bed unit is the largest in the nation.
- It is set up to handle highly contagious and deadly infectious conditions, including: SARS, smallpox, plague, Ebola virus disease and other viral hemorrhagic fevers.
- In 2014, the unit was one of only three in the United States called upon by the U.S. State Department to care for U.S. citizens who acquired Ebola virus disease in Africa.
- The unit also has been extensively involved in the training of hospitals in the U.S. and abroad to prepare for Ebola virus disease patients.

Unit history

2009 – Unit activated for a suspected viral hemorrhagic fever patient who turned out to have a non-contagious disease (malaria)

2014 – Unit activated for Ebola virus disease patients

September 2014 – Rick Sacra, M.D., treated and released

October 2014 – Ashoka Mukpo, treated and released

November 2014 – Martin Salia, M.D., arrived gravely ill; passed away after two days of treatment

January 2015 – patient arrived but did not test positive, released after 21 days of monitoring

February 2015 – person monitored in private residence in collaboration with the Douglas County Health Department and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Person did not test positive, released after 21 days of monitoring.

March 2015 – five persons were transported to Omaha for monitoring in collaboration with the Douglas County Health Department and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.
Services. One person was temporarily moved into the Biocontainment Unit with symptoms, however, did not test positive and was later released for observation. All five persons being monitored are doing well.

**Recent highlights**

**October 2014** – Developed online courses for health care providers

**November 2014** – Developed a series of webinars on Ebola care for health providers

UNMC Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., testifies before Congress to outline proposals for expansion of the medical center's role in fighting Ebola and other infectious diseases

**December 2014** – Omaha World-Herald recognizes the Biocontainment Unit team as “Midlanders of the Year”

Began Ebola training of more than 30 of the top hospitals and academic medical centers in the country

**January 2015** – Biocontainment Unit Medical Director, Philip Smith, M.D., attends State of the Union address

The World Health Organization invites UNMC to join its Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network as a partner in a worldwide collaboration of more than 300 institutions and networks that react rapidly to outbreaks of international importance to cut response time to days and hours.

**February 2015** – UNMC Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., and physicians who treated Ebola patients, Philip Smith, M.D., and Angela Hewlett, M.D., attended a White House ceremony recognizing caregivers of Ebola patients. President Barack Obama praised the medical center for delivering “world-class care” to Rick Sacra, M.D., a physician who was treated in the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit and who also was in attendance.

**March 2015** – Held a research symposium in Omaha with leading infectious disease experts

Began participating in a clinical research study of experimental drugs used for Ebola patients

Resolution (LR 41) approved by the Nebraska Legislature to encourage Nebraska’s elected officials to work with federal agencies to establish a national training center for highly infectious diseases at UNMC/Nebraska Medicine and recognized the Nebraska Biocontainment Unit for its service to the state, nation, and world.