



Public Guidance on Protecting Civil Rights While Responding to the Ebola Virus

The Ebola outbreak in West Africa has led to increased reports of discrimination in the United States against people who are or are perceived to be from an African country or of African descent, as well as against those perceived as having Ebola. Discrimination based on race, color, national origin, citizenship status, or disability is unlawful under several federal laws and may result in criminal or civil liability.

The Ebola outbreak is primarily located in certain West African countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mali) (“outbreak countries”). Unfounded fears about possible exposure to Ebola based on assumptions about a person’s race, national origin, or perceived disability status raise concerns about discriminatory treatment. Discrimination may arise in many different contexts, including but not limited to education, employment, health and safety, housing, and places of public accommodation.

Here are examples of situations that could lead to violations of federal civil rights law in the context of the Ebola virus:

- If a school requires that a child stay home because that child is from a country in Africa or of African descent, despite the fact that the child has not been required to do so by public health authorities in accordance with CDC Ebola guidance, that school may be discriminating against that child based on race, color, national origin, or perceived disability. Likewise, if a school fails to effectively address Ebola-related harassment and bullying of students, that school may be in violation of its legal obligations.
- If an employer refuses to hire a qualified individual, prohibits an employee from reporting to work, or changes the employee’s work assignments because that employee is from an African country or of African descent out of a fear that the employee has Ebola, despite the fact that the employee is not at risk for Ebola exposure, as determined by public health authorities in accordance with CDC guidance, the employer may be discriminating against the employee based on race, color, national origin, or perceived disability. Similarly, if an employer causes or allows a hostile work environment involving Ebola-related harassment or discrimination, that employer may be in violation of its legal obligations.
- If a housing provider, such as an apartment complex or landlord, refuses to rent to a humanitarian aid worker who recently returned from an African country that is not experiencing an Ebola outbreak out of a fear that the applicant has Ebola, that landlord may be discriminating against the applicant based on perceived disability.
- If a local government agency or community organization providing services during a disaster refuses to provide services to an individual because the person is from an African country or of African descent out of a fear that the applicant has Ebola, that provider may be discriminating against the individual based on race, national origin, or perceived disability.

If you believe you are a victim of discrimination based on your race, color, national origin, citizenship status, or actual or perceived disability status, you may contact one of the federal agencies listed on the following table about your concern.

For more information on the federal government’s response to the Ebola virus, see the following links:

[The White House: The Administration’s Response to Ebola](#)
[Get the latest CDC updates on the current outbreak](#)