

Immigrants From Ebola-Stricken Nations Won't Be Deported

The Department of Homeland Security will grant temporary protected status to people from the three West African countries most affected by Ebola who are currently residing in the United States, department officials said on Thursday.

People from Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone in the United States as of Thursday may apply for protection from deportation, as well as for work permits, for 18 months, said a Department of Homeland Security official.

After 18 months, the Secretary of Homeland Security will assess whether the protection should be extended, based on the level of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

The move is a response to the Ebola epidemic, which has claimed more than 5,000 lives, mostly in the three West African countries.

In order to prevent a mass migration from West Africa to the United States, nationals from these countries who arrive after Thursday will not be eligible for protected status.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services officials estimate that 8,000 people will be eligible to apply.

"The Ebola response in the United States has been front and center in the United States government at high levels," said a Department of Homeland Security official. "This designation has been part of that constant monitoring, reevaluation and reassessment of the appropriate response."

The United States reserves temporary protected status for people from countries experiencing conditions deemed too dangerous to return to, such as Haiti after the 2010

earthquake.

Unlike other recipients, protected people from West Africa will not be allowed to travel home and then return to the United States, in order to prevent the disease from spreading.

Nationals from the three countries must undergo a background check in order to receive protected status. Those with a criminal history will not be approved, said the Homeland Security official.

Reporting by Julia Edwards; editing by Bernadette Baum.