

Canada has possible Ebola case: health officials (Update)

March 24 2014

A man returning to Canada from Liberia is seriously ill in hospital after experiencing symptoms consistent with the Ebola virus that has killed dozens in Guinea, health officials have said.

The man has been placed in solitary confinement pending the expected results on Tuesday of tests on his condition. His family are in quarantine in Saskatchewan province, the local health ministry said in a statement.

"A diagnosis has not yet been confirmed. Measures have been taken to isolate the patient to ensure the illness is not transmitted," the ministry said.

Public health officials earlier sought to contain people's concerns, saying the risk to the public was low and noting that an investigation into the case's circumstances was under way.

"All we know at this point is that we have a person who is critically ill who travelled from a country where these diseases occur," Denise Werker, joint director of health in Saskatchewan, in western Canada, told reporters.

The casualty had been in Liberia but developed the symptoms after landing in Canada and would not have been contagious when in transit, she said.

"The information that we have now is this person was not ill when he

travelled," Werker added. "People are not very contagious in the incubation period. There is also a possibility this person has another disease."

Aid workers and health officials in Guinea are battling to contain west Africa's first outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus, after neighboring Liberia reported its first suspected victims.

At least 59 people are known to have died in Guinea's southern forests but the Liberian cases, if confirmed, would mark the first spread of the highly contagious pathogen into another country.

Werker said the risk of contagion in Canada was low as the disease, one of the world's most virulent, is transmitted to humans from wild animals and between humans by direct contact with blood, feces or sweat, or by sexual contact and the unprotected handling of contaminated corpses.

To date, no treatment or vaccine is available for the Ebola pathogen, which kills between 25 and 90 percent of those who fall sick, depending on the strain of the virus, according to the World Health Organization.

The tropical virus—described in some health publications as a "molecular shark"—can fell its victims within days, causing severe fever and muscle pain, weakness, vomiting and diarrhoea—in some cases shutting down organs and causing unstoppable bleeding.

It was first discovered in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 1976. The central African country has suffered eight outbreaks.

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