

Guinea reports Ebola death toll rises to 78

March 31 2014, by Boubacar Diallo



In this photo taken on Saturday, March 29, 2014, medical personnel at the emergency entrance of a hospital receive suspected Ebola virus patients in Conakry, Guinea. Senegal has closed its land border with neighboring Guinea to prevent the spread of the Ebola outbreak, which has killed at least 70 people. Senegal's Interior Ministry announced the border closure Saturday. It also said officials in the southern region of Kolda closed a weekly market which draws thousands of people from the neighboring West African countries of Guinea, Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. Guinea confirmed last week that several victims of hemorrhagic fever in the country's southern region had tested positive for Ebola. (AP Photo/ Youssouf Bah)

Health authorities in Guinea are facing an "unprecedented epidemic" of Ebola, an international aid group warned Monday as the death toll from the disease that causes severe bleeding reached 78.

The Ebola outbreak is the first of its kind in West Africa in two decades. Authorities in neighboring Senegal have closed the land border with Guinea. Liberia, another neighboring country, has confirmed two cases, one of them fatal.

Senegalese music superstar Youssou Ndour cancelled a weekend concert in Conakry, Guinea's capital, because he feared the disease could spread in a [large crowd](#) gathered to hear him. Residents have steered clear of the hospital in the city of 2 million where, according to authorities, relatives of one victim are being held in isolation.

The emergence of Ebola in Guinea poses challenges never seen in previous outbreaks that involved "more remote locations as opposed to urban areas," said Doctors Without Borders. Ebola has struck down people in Conakry as well as in Guinea's rural south.

"The vast geographic spread of the Guinea outbreak is worrisome because it will greatly complicate the tasks of the organizations working to control the epidemic," said Mariano Lugli, the group's coordinator in Conakry.



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The Ebola virus was first discovered in Congo—then known as Zaire—in 1976. There is no vaccine or specific treatment for it. The Zaire strain detected in Guinea can kill up to 90 percent of its victims who suffer extensive internal and external bleeding.

Officials have not conclusively ruled how the virus showed up in Guinea, a West African nation far from Congo's borders. However, bats that carry the virus are eaten as a local delicacy in Guinea.

The virus can be transmitted from human to human through direct contact with the blood or secretions of an infected person, or objects that have been contaminated with infected secretions. Bereaved relatives can also contract the virus when coming into contact with the victims' bodies at communal funerals, health officials say.

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