

Ebola-hit Guinea calls for calm after attack on aid group

April 5 2014, by Mouctar Bah

Guinea appealed for calm in the Ebola-hit south of the country on Saturday after international aid workers battling to contain an outbreak of the deadly virus were attacked by a mob.

Doctors without Borders, which goes by its French initials MSF, was forced to suspend treatment in Macenta in southeastern Guinea on Friday after crowds attacked one of its centres.

Conakry said the crowd had gathered as rumours circulated in the town that the virus was "imported into Guinea or that Ebola fever does not exist in our country".

Health authorities have reported 137 suspected or confirmed Ebola cases since the beginning of the year, of which 86 have been fatal.

Several west African countries have geared up to tackle killer haemorrhagic fevers including Ebola as new suspect cases emerged in Mali, along with Liberia and Sierra Leone.

A rare but extremely dangerous virus, Ebola is historically rooted in central Africa and has never before spread amongst humans in the west of the continent.

MSF has described the outbreak as an "unprecedented epidemic" and warned the unusual geographical spread of cases complicates the task of containing it "enormously".

Guinea's government in a statement Saturday vowed that lawbreakers would be brought to justice and said it was "calling for calm and serenity to enable our partners to support us to eradicate this epidemic".

"The government has protested against such information and reiterates that only the recognition of the existence of the disease will help in the fight against it," it said.

Ebola leads to haemorrhagic fever, which causes muscle pain, weakness, vomiting, diarrhoea and, in severe cases, organ failure and unstoppable bleeding.

The tropical virus can be transmitted to humans from wild animals, and between humans through direct contact with another's blood, faeces or sweat.

Sexual contact, or the unprotected handling of contaminated corpses, can also lead to infection.

"The contribution of (MSF) and all international organisations that are supporting Guinea in the fight against the pandemic is invaluable and has helped so far to contain the disease," the government said.

"Without these partners, the disease would not be under control today."

- Airport screening -

MSF has 52 international experts working alongside Guinean staff in Conakry and the provincial towns of Gueckedou and Macenta, in the southern epicentre of the outbreak.

"MSF's head of mission is in Gueckedou to meet with the regional governor, senior health officials and local community leaders. We hope

to restart our work as soon as possible," spokesman Sam Taylor told AFP on Saturday.

Congolese aid group Doctors of Africa said it had been working with the World Health Organization since Thursday at Conakry's international airport to screen departures.

Patrice Loua, a volunteer with the pan-African charity, said people leaving the country through the hub were asked to fill in questionnaires about symptoms they might have experienced and quarantined immediately if it appeared they might have Ebola.

"The aim... is to prevent the spread of the disease and reassure the international community that arrangements are being made in Conakry to prevent the spread of the disease," he said.

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Citation: Ebola-hit Guinea calls for calm after attack on aid group (2014, April 5) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-04-ebola-hit-guinea-calm-aid-group.html>

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