

Ebola virus in Africa outbreak is a new strain

April 16 2014, by Marilynn Marchione



In this Saturday, March 29, 2014 file photo, medical personnel at the emergency entrance of a hospital wait to receive suspected Ebola virus patients in Conakry, Guinea. The Ebola virus that has killed scores of people in Guinea in 2014 is a new strain _ evidence that the disease did not spread there from outbreaks in some other African nations, scientists reported Wednesday, April 16, 2014 in the New England Journal of Medicine. "The source of the virus is still not known," but it was not imported from nearby countries, said Dr. Stephan Gunther of the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine in Hamburg, Germany. (AP Photo/Youssouf Bah)

The Ebola virus that has killed scores of people in Guinea this year is a new strain—evidence that the disease did not spread there from outbreaks in some other African nations, scientists report.

"The source of the virus is still not known," but it was not imported from nearby countries, said Dr. Stephan Gunther of the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine in Hamburg, Germany.

He led an international team of researchers who studied the genetics of the virus and reported results online Wednesday in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The ongoing outbreak has caused panic and killed more than 120 people in West Africa, mostly in Guinea, according to the World Health Organization.

Ebola causes internal bleeding and organ failure and is fatal in 30 percent to 90 percent of cases, depending on the strain. It spreads through direct contact with infected people, and some earlier cases have been linked to certain fruit bats that live in West Africa.

There is no cure or vaccine, so containing the outbreak has focused on supportive care for those infected with the virus and isolating them to limit its spread.

Earlier, health officials had said the Guinea Ebola was a Zaire strain, different from the kind that has caused cases in other parts of Africa. The Democratic Republic of Congo used to be called Zaire.

The new research analyzed blood samples from 20 patients in the current outbreak and found the strain was unique.

"It is not coming from the Democratic Republic of Congo. It has not

been imported to Guinea" from that country or from Gabon, where Ebola also has occurred, Gunther said.

Researchers think the Guinea and other strains evolved in parallel from a recent ancestor virus. The Guinea outbreak likely began last December or earlier and might have been smoldering for some time unrecognized. The investigation continues to try to identify "the presumed animal source," they write.

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