

WHO unveils emergency moves against Ebola onslaught in Guinea (Update)

April 10 2014, by Jonathan Fowler

The World Health Organization launched a raft of emergency measures in the Guinean capital Conakry Thursday to control an outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus that has so far killed a hundred people across the country.

The Geneva-based UN health agency announced emergency training for 70 people who would fan out across the community to track people who have had close contact with Ebola patients.

The agency is also setting up a special alert and response operation centre within the Guinean ministry of health in order to handle all matters relating to the Ebola scare.

The WHO also said that it was training staff at Guinea's Donka national teaching hospital and would be expanding that programme to other health facilities in the coming days.

The WHO this week described west Africa's first-ever Ebola outbreak among humans as one of the most challenging since the virus emerged in 1976 in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo.

According to the latest WHO figures, 157 people have been infected with Ebola in Guinea, 101 of whom have died.

The outbreak began in the forests of southern Guinea, but has spread to Conkary, a sprawling port city on the Atlantic coast and home to

between 1.5 million and two million people.

In neighbouring Liberia, there have been 21 cases, including 10 fatalities.

While the WHO has not recommended any trade or travel restrictions, the region is braced against the epidemic, with Senegal closing its border with Guinea.

In Dakar, UNICEF said it was working with WHO and other agencies to spread awareness by sending text messages and links of radio and television shows automatically to mobile phones across west Africa.

"Most of the people in this part of the world had never heard of Ebola before," Guido Borghese, the organisation's principal adviser on child survival and development for the region, said in a statement.

"In this environment, unfounded fears and rumours spread quickly and widely. More than ever, it is crucial that families have both the means and the right information to protect themselves and prevent dangerous misunderstandings."

Meanwhile the French Red Cross said in Paris it was deploying its first emergency response team to the epicentre of the outbreak in southeastern Guinea.

The team—made up of volunteers and a specialist in infectious diseases—will supervise and train 150 local Red Cross volunteers in disinfection and techniques to track down people who may have had contact with the infected.

The most severe strains of Ebola have had a 90 percent fatality rate, and there is no vaccine, cure or specific treatment.

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

The chances of survival increase if patients are kept hydrated and treated for secondary infections.

The virus can be transmitted to humans who handle sick or dead wild animals—believed to be its original source—and between humans through direct contact with another's blood, faeces or sweat.

It can be stemmed by identifying the sick and tracing those with whom they have had contact—more than 600 people in Guinea, according to the WHO—and applying infection-control measures in homes and clinics.

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