

West Africa gears up to fight Ebola, killer fevers

April 4 2014, by Serge Daniel With Zoom Dosso In Monrovia

Several west African countries geared up on Friday to tackle killer haemorrhagic fevers including Ebola, which has claimed more than 80 lives in Guinea and just seen suspect cases emerge in Mali, after Liberia and Sierra Leone.

The health minister in Mali, one of Guinea's neighbours, late Thursday announced three suspect cases of Ebola and said the victims had been placed in isolation, while test samples were sent to the US Center for Disease Control.

On Friday morning, Health Minister Ousmane Kone told AFP that the patients "are doing better. For example, we haven't observed ... bleeding."

External and internal bleeding are among the symptoms of highly contagious Ebola, which kills up to 90 percent of patients in its most virulent strain.

Oumar Sangare of the national health directorate said that all three patients were Malian citizens who "worked in a border zone between Mali and Guinea".

"They were separately spotted when they arrived by road on Malian soil in (the capital) Bamako or at the entrance" to the city, he said.

Mali's authorities have warned people against "unnecessary travel to

epidemic zones."

The nation worst hit by the latest outbreak is Guinea, where haemorrhagic fever has killed 86 people out of 137 cases registered since January, according to the latest government toll.

The World Health Organisation said Friday that it is monitoring "just under 400" cases in the country, and is in contact with all those who may have come in contact with the disease from the forested southeast area of the country.

Other haemorrhagic fevers, including Marburg, have similar symptoms to Ebola, including muscle pain, vomiting and diarrhoea, as well as heavy bleeding and organ failure in severe cases, causing death.

Forty-five of Guinea's cases have been confirmed as Ebola, for which there is no cure and little treatment, but "we have noted recoveries, confirmed by medical tests, in two patients affected by Ebola in Conakry," the government reported late on Thursday.

Such recoveries are a slim ray of hope in a situation described by charity Doctors Without Borders, known by its French acronym MSF, as an "unprecedented epidemic", where the unusual geographical spread of cases complicates the task "enormously" for those trying to contain it.

'Keep away from bushmeat'

Several suspect cases, including fatalities, have been reported in Liberia and Sierra Leone, almost all due to contamination from neighbouring Guinea. Ebola tests proved positive for two cases in Liberia and negative for those in Sierra Leone.

However, an alarming new factor emerged on Thursday when Liberia's

health ministry announced the discovery of a suspect case in a forest near the eastern town of Tapeta, with no Guinean connection.

"We have a case in Tapeta where a hunter who has not had any contact with anyone coming from Guinea got sick," chief medical officer Bernice Dahn told AFP.

"He was rushed to the hospital and died 30 minutes later. He never had any interaction with someone suspected to be a carrier of the virus and he has never gone to Guinea. This was an a isolated case."

Samples from the hunter have been sent to Guinea for analysis and Dahn said Friday that "while waiting for the result, we have asked the population to keep away from the bushmeat. The same precaution is taken everywhere in the country."

Sylvain Baize, who heads France's National Reference Centre for haemorrhagic fever, pointed to the fruit bat, a regional delicacy that is suspected to be a natural "reservoir" for the Ebola virus.

The disease can spread to animal primates and humans who handle infected meat—a risk given the informal trade in "bushmeat" in forested central and west Africa.

Of Liberia's 14 cases of haemorrhagic fever, including seven deaths, every contaminated person apart from the hunter had direct or indirect contact with Guineans before heading to the Lofa region in the north.

The west African region is confronted with its first ever major outbreak of such disease, unlike such central African nations as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon, where some 1,200 people have been killed by Ebola since the virus was first discovered in 1976 in the former Zaire.

Kinshasa said on Friday that it would send four epidemiology experts to assist in Guinea.

Health Minister Félix Kabange Numbi said the DRC would "increase the threshold of surveillance", monitoring 98 entry points and the country's hospitals.

Guinea's neighbours have sent health teams to border territory and introduced measures to prepare for new cases and to prevent the spread of haemorrhagic fever from districts where it has emerged. Authorities in the region are informing their populations about how to avoid contamination.

Health measures and reassuring official statements have failed to quell fears among some residents of Mali's capital.

"I'm really afraid," said Mamadou Sylla, the muezzin of a mosque, adding that he visited a health centre before the official announcement of suspect cases. "A sick man came in and everybody thought he had Ebola. Everyone fled."

© 2014 AFP

Citation: West Africa gears up to fight Ebola, killer fevers (2014, April 4) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-04-west-africa-gears-ebola-killer.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.