

Ebola spread due to 'relaxation' of efforts: WHO

June 21 2014, by Agnes Pedrero

The recent rapid spread of Ebola in three countries in West Africa has come in part because efforts to contain the deadly virus have been relaxed, Pierre Formenty, a World Health Organisation specialist, told AFP on Saturday.

Question: We have around 530 [cases](#) of [hemorrhagic fever](#), mostly from the Ebola virus, in the region, compared to 225 at the end of April. How do you explain this leap?

Answer: We have had since March 21, when the epidemic was declared in Guinea, a first wave that has started to diminish. Since the start of May we have had a sort of resurgence with an increase in the number of cases and notably also with an epidemic which has spread to Sierra Leone and Liberia. We are seeing a second wave of cases for West Africa.

Q: How do you explain this new peak?

A: When the epidemic started, it was a little under-estimated, so that the states took a while to really prepare themselves. At the end of April, we started to see a decrease in the number of cases and we maybe saw a relaxation by the teams in the three countries, and this relaxation allowed things to restart. In addition, there were some problems with the affected populations which were sometimes not fully listened to.

Q: Were the right measures implemented?

A: The most important things are monitoring and communication. States are getting better and better but the problems of communication continue. The medical corps on their own cannot stop this epidemic. It is only with the help of the [population](#) that we can fight this epidemic and stop it.

Q: What are the specific features of this epidemic?

A: The epidemic is pretty much identical in the three countries. What's really important in this epidemic is that the majority of cases are cases of human-to-human transmission, by contact, especially during care, but also during funerals because it is particularly when victims are deceased that Ebola is present around the body.

Q: How did the epidemic spread?

A: The epicentre of this epidemic is in the forested border zone around the town of Gueckedou (in the south of Guinea) and now it has spread to the district of Kailahun in Sierra Leone and the district of Lofa in Liberia. It has been spread most of all by people who travel to Conakry or Monrovia for healthcare. These people travel a great deal. As soon as they are sick with the symptoms, even if they know that it might be Ebola, they will go see friends in one town or another and that's how the disease spreads.

Q: Why is it important for the authorities and humanitarian agencies to communicate with the populations?

A: One case can restart an entire [epidemic](#). So these dramatic measures, which are not put in place for other diseases like meningitis or measles, are hard for the populations to understand. In an area where the quality of health services are not optimal, the populations have struggled to understand why we were asking them to make such an effort and

probably we have not been able to explain both the disease and the means of control to the populations.

Q: What is the latest assessment of the WHO?

A: As of June 17, we had 528 cases of Ebola, including confirmed, probable and suspected cases. Included in these 528 cases are 337 dead. All the deaths are confirmed, probable or suspected cases of Ebola. At the level of the international community, Doctors Without Borders, WHO and other international partners have mobilised 100 to 160 international experts who are on the ground and who are working hard. In Conakry, for patients admitted (to hospital) we have been able to reduce the mortality rate to 40 percent.

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