

Guinea declares emergency as W.Africa awaits experimental Ebola drug

August 14 2014, by Rod Mac Johnson And Frankie Taggart With Zoom Dosso In Monrovia

Guinea declared an Ebola outbreak that has killed 377 in the nation a "health emergency" Wednesday and more flights from hard-hit west African countries were cancelled as the region awaited shipments of experimental vaccine.

Guinean President Alpha Conde announced a series of measures including strict controls at border points, travel restrictions and a ban on moving bodies "from one town to another until the end of the epidemic".

In addition all suspected victims will automatically be hospitalised until they are cleared of infection, Conde said.

As the region scrambled to halt the spread of the virus, Gambia suspended all flights from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, according to a transport ministry document obtained by AFP Wednesday.

The death toll in the worst epidemic of Ebola since its discovery four decades ago climbed to 1,069 Wednesday, according to the World Health Organisation which said 56 people had died in two days. Nearly 2,000 have now been infected.

Canada's Health Minister Rona Ambrose said between 800 to 1,000 doses of a vaccine called VSV-EBOV, which has shown promise in animal research but never been tested on humans, would be distributed through the WHO.

Hard-hit nations were also anxiously awaiting a consignment of up to 1,000 doses of the barely-tested drug ZMapp from the US, which has raised hopes of saving hundreds infected with the disease.

The virus has hit doctors hard in the ill-equipped and fragile health systems of the worst-affected nations of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Liberia is trying to save the lives of two infected doctors and is hoping that the ZMapp serum, which has shown positive early results, arrives in time.

Sierra Leone's health ministry spokesman Sidi Yahya Tunis told AFP the country had officially requested a shipment of the drug as the nation lost its second top doctor to the virus.

The death of Modupeh Cole, a senior physician in the capital Freetown, came just two weeks after the country's only virologist and leading Ebola expert, Umar Khan, died of the tropical disease.

There is currently no available cure or vaccine for Ebola, which the WHO has declared a global public [health emergency](#), and the use of experimental drugs has stoked a fierce debate.

The WHO has declared it is ethical to try largely untested treatments "in the special circumstances of this Ebola outbreak".

In Nigeria three people have died in the megacity of Lagos. A nurse who contracted the virus at a hospital there broke a quarantine order and travelled to the eastern part of the country, raising fears of new infections outside the city.

Promising vaccines

The company behind ZMapp said it had sent all its available supplies to the region following an outcry over the fact it had so far only been used on Westerners, but supplies are extremely limited.

Its effectiveness is far from proven, but it appears to have had a positive effect on two US aid workers infected in Liberia. However, an elderly Spanish priest also infected in the country died in a Madrid hospital Tuesday despite being treated with ZMapp.

Canadian lab Tekmira said it is also in contact with the WHO and government agencies over the possible use of its experimental TKM-Ebola drug.

As west African countries waited for help from afar, the international community took further measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

Germany called on its nationals to leave Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, although it said it was keeping its embassies there open.

In Riyadh, representatives of the Gulf monarchies met to discuss ways to guard against the epidemic ahead of the arrival of millions of Muslims from around the world for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in early October.

'We are all scared'

In Freetown, meanwhile, the tropical fever was the only topic of conversation.

"We are all scared because of the way Ebola is spreading, but we are taking all the necessary precautions," said Waisu Gassama, 27, who works in the HIV department of the dilapidated, century-old Connaught

Hospital.

Outside the hospital, soldiers said they have been drafted in to guard doctors and nurses, many of whom have been targeted by angry mobs blaming modern medicine for exacerbating the epidemic.

Terror has gripped the impoverished west African countries, with harrowing tales have emerged of people being shunned by their villages as the virus fells those around them.

When AFP visited the Liberian village of Ballajah, some 150 kilometres (90 miles) from the capital Monrovia, 12-year-old Fatu Sherrif had been locked away with her mother's body without food and water for a week.

Her cries went unanswered as panicked residents fled the village when both her parents fell sick.

Fatu later died and her brother Barnie, 15, despite testing negative for Ebola, was left alone and hungry in an abandoned house.

"Nobody wants to come near me and they know—people told them that I don't have Ebola," he told AFP.

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