

Ebola outbreak could peak by end of year: EU

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The deadly Ebola epidemic in west Africa could peak by the end of the year if global aid efforts are kept up, EU experts said Wednesday after visiting the stricken region.

The outbreak has killed nearly 3,000 people, with the WHO warning the number of cases could explode and the US saying 1.4 million could be infected by January 2015.

The European Union experts, who visited Liberia and Sierra Leone, which along with Guinea are at the heart of the outbreak, said months of "exponential growth" were ahead.

"We'll certainly not deal with it before the end of the year," Philippe Maughan, a senior European Commission aid official, told a briefing in Brussels.

"Our hope is that we'll have a plateau situation at the end of the year."

But that timescale to rein in the [disease](#) would only be met "if everything goes well," said Marcus Cornaro, a senior EU development official.

He said it needed "strong leadership and massive international support".

The EU has pledged 150 million euros (\$195 million) to tackling the Ebola crisis, part of a huge international effort that has seen the US military deploy 3,000 troops to provide training and logistics.

Sierra Leone's three-day Ebola lockdown earlier this month was "by and large a success", especially in terms of informing the local population about the disease and avoiding a "witch-hunt", the EU's Cornaro said.

"Hopefully we can keep it in these three countries," he said, adding however that the EU was also focused on making sure neighbouring countries were ready to deal with any potential spread of Ebola.

But he insisted that countries affected by the disease should not be isolated, as it was vital both logistically and psychologically for them to keep up contact.

Maughan warned that there could be food shortages in the region next year as economic activity has been disrupted.

The World Health Organization warned on Tuesday that the Ebola epidemic is set to explode without an urgent response, and that hundreds of thousands could be infected by the end of the year.

The US Centers for Disease Control meanwhile estimated that cases in Liberia and Sierra Leone could rocket to 1.4 million by January 2015, although that was a worst-case scenario based on data obtained before the world ramped up its response.

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