

Sierra Leone, Liberia brace for new Ebola cases

September 22 2014, by Clarence Roy-Macaulay



A baby pig sleeps in front of an ambulance used at the Connaught Hospital as part of their Ebola virus fleet, during a three-day lockdown to prevent the spread on the Ebola virus in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Sunday, Sept. 21, 2014.

Volunteers going door to door during a three-day lockdown intended to combat Ebola in Sierra Leone say some residents are growing increasingly frustrated and complaining about food shortages. (AP Photo/ Michael Duff)

Two of the West African nations hardest hit by Ebola were bracing for new caseloads on Monday after trying to outflank the outbreak with a

nationwide checkup and a large new clinic.

Sierra Leone was expected to announce a sharp increase in Ebola patients Tuesday following a nationwide effort to identify new cases, while Liberia opened its largest treatment center yet.

Both countries have poor health systems, weakened by the loss to Ebola of many of doctors and nurses. The World Health Organization estimated last week that they have only about 20 percent of the beds they need to treat Ebola patients.

Still, identifying the sick is fundamental to containing the disease, and Sierra Leone went to an extreme unseen since the plague ravaged Europe during the Middle Ages, ordering an entire nation's people to remain at home while teams went door to door handing out soap and information.

More than 1 million households were checked for Ebola and told how to prevent its spread, authorities said.

Officials had previously predicted that they would find hundreds of new cases during the three-day shutdown, and government spokesman Abdulai Bayraytay said Sierra Leone was preparing tents for use as temporary treatment centers before announcing their findings on Tuesday.



A few people are seen during a three-day lockdown to prevent the spread of the Ebola virus, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Sunday, Sept. 21, 2014. Volunteers going door to door during a three-day lockdown intended to combat Ebola in Sierra Leone say some residents are growing increasingly frustrated and complaining about food shortages. (AP Photo/Michael Duff)

In Liberia, meanwhile, ambulances rushed to fill the nation's largest new treatment center, a 150-bed hospital on the outskirts of Monrovia that opened on Sunday, run by the Health Ministry, WHO and a team of Ugandan doctors.

By Monday, the new clinic had admitted 112 people, though only 46 of those have tested positive for Ebola, said Assistant Health Minister Tolbert Nyenswah. The rest were being held for observation and treated for other diseases, like malaria.

Ebola, transmitted through bodily fluids, is now blamed for the deaths of more than 2,800 people in West Africa, according to new figures

released Monday by the WHO. More than 5,800 are believed to have been sickened. Most of the infections have been in Liberia, but the disease, which was first identified in Guinea, has also spread to Nigeria and Senegal.

At least 77 bodies were buried during Sierra Leone's shutdown and half tested positive for Ebola, Bayraytay said. Officials were waiting on laboratory tests for the other half. The disease is thought to have killed more than 600 people in the nation of 6 million.

Lockdowns are hard to enforce, and being stuck at home for three days caused much frustration and some food shortages. By themselves, they aren't likely to contain an outbreak. But they can certainly help send a public health message, said Joe Amon, director of health and human rights for Human Rights Watch.

The teams reached about 75 percent of the nation's 1.5 million households, the Health Ministry said, carrying bars of soap and information about the disease. Rumors that the soap had been poisoned served to show how important these education efforts are, authorities said.



In this photo taken in 2013, provided by the San Juan de Dios Order, Spanish priest Manuel Garcia Viejo, poses in the San Juan de Dios Hospital in the city of Lunsar in Sierra Leone where he worked. Garcia Viejo, who was diagnosed with the Ebola virus while working in Sierra Leone, was flown back to Spain for treatment in a Madrid hospital Monday, Sept. 22, 2014. Brother Manuel Garcia Viejo, was a medical director of the San Juan de Dios Hospital in the city of Lunsar in Sierra Leone. (AP Photo/San Juan de Dios Order)

Sierra Leone residents overwhelmingly complied by staying in their homes, but in one incident health workers trying to bury five bodies 20 kilometers (12 miles) east of Freetown were attacked on Saturday. After police reinforcements arrived, the [health](#) workers completed the burial.

Nearly 350 [health workers](#) in West Africa have been infected, and more than half of those have died. A Spanish priest who became infected while serving as a medical director for a hospital in Sierra Leone was flown back to Spain on Monday.

There are no approved treatments or vaccines for Ebola, but drug makers are rushing to test experimental therapies. The small supply of one drug, ZMapp, was exhausted after being used on a few patients.



In this photo provided by the Spanish Defense Ministry, aid workers and doctors transfer Manuel Garcia Viejo, a Spanish priest who was diagnosed with the Ebola virus while working in Sierra Leone, from a military plane to an ambulance as he leaves the Torrejon de Ardoz military airbase, near Madrid, Spain, Monday, Sept. 22, 2014. The Spanish priest who was diagnosed with the Ebola virus while working in Sierra Leone has been flown back to Spain and taken to a Madrid hospital. Garcia Viejo, a medical director of the San Juan de Dios Hospital in the city of Lunsar in Sierra Leone, arrived on a medically equipped military plane shortly after 3 a.m. Monday. (AP Photo/Spanish Defense Ministry)

On Monday, Tekmira Pharmaceuticals of Canada said its experimental Ebola treatment had been used on a number of patients, and that

regulators in the U.S. and Canada had approved its use in more after results showed the drug had been well-tolerated.

Tekmira said there were limited supplies of its TKM-Ebola drug and because it has not been used in an actual study, the company acknowledged that it is impossible to tell if it had any effect.

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Citation: Sierra Leone, Liberia brace for new Ebola cases (2014, September 22) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-09-sierra-leone-liberia-brace-ebola.html>

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