

Sierra Leone says 300 sick or dead found in Ebola lockdown

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Sierra Leone said on Wednesday around 100 bodies and 200 patients had been collected from homes during its three-day lockdown to stem the deadly Ebola epidemic raging in west Africa.

Almost six million people across the country were confined indoors for 72 hours from Friday while 28,000 volunteers went door-to-door, giving out advice and identifying new suspected cases and deaths that had been kept from the authorities.

"Over 92 bodies were discovered nationwide during the three-day lockdown of the country," Karamoh Kabbah, the deputy minister for political affairs, told a news conference in the capital Freetown.

He said 77 of the bodies had been collected in the Western Area, a division including the city of 1.2 million and its immediate surroundings.

"Over 200 suspected cases were identified... of which, so far, 130 have been confirmed positive," he added.

The deadliest Ebola epidemic on record has infected almost 6,000 people in west Africa and killed nearly half of them, according to the World Health Organization's latest figures.

The fever the virus causes can fell its victims within days, causing severe muscle pain, vomiting, diarrhoea and—in many cases—unstoppable internal and external bleeding.

In Sierra Leone, Ebola has infected 1,813 people, killing 593.

Kabbah confirmed an earlier estimate that the door-to-door teams had managed to get to around 80 percent of households in a country where a large proportion of the population live in remote and sometimes inaccessible villages.

But he said the exercise had raised concerns over the methods used by security forces in enforcing quarantines, without going into detail.

Health Minister Abubakarr Fofanah said not all the bodies collected had been confirmed as Ebola victims.

"Even prior to the outbreak, people were dying from tuberculosis, malaria, hypertension and even as a result of old age," he said.

"While government does not intend to massage the figures of death caused by Ebola, it is also mindful of the fact that there are many other causes of death in the country."

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