

Sierra Leone expects to uncover hundreds of hidden Ebola cases: govt

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Sierra Leone said on Wednesday it expected to uncover up to 20 percent more Ebola victims when it imposes a nationwide curfew to find the dead and sufferers who have yet to go to hospital.

The government has announced the shutdown, with the population of six million confined to their homes except for essential business, for 72 hours starting from September 19.

More than 20,000 volunteers will go door-to-door to remove bodies and take patients who have not yet gone to hospital into the care of medics.

The government's Ebola emergency operation centre said 10 areas of the capital Freetown had been designated as "hot spots" charged with dealing with the surge in cases expected.

"Isolation centres including schools equipped with beds will be set up as we envisage a five percent to 20 percent surge during the exercise, which is aimed at breaking the chain of transmission," Steven Ngaoja, head of the centre, told a news conference in Freetown.

The Ebola outbreak has killed almost 2,300 people in four west African nations.

Sierra Leone has reported some 500 deaths from almost 1,400 cases since it registered its first infection in May.

The government has set aside \$1.3 million (1.0 million euros) to cover the costs of the shutdown, most of which has been donated by the United Nations Children's Fund, according to health ministry spokesman Yahya Tunis.

The health ministry has said it plans to distribute 1.2 million bars of soap—enough for every household in the country.

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