

Ebola expert says China at risk, seeks Japan aid

October 30 2014, by Elaine Kurtenbach

A scientist who helped to discover the Ebola virus says he is concerned that the disease could spread to China given the large numbers of Chinese workers traveling to and from Africa.

Peter Piot, who is director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said Thursday it's not "rocket science" that with many exchanges between the two regions the disease could spread.

"The concern I have is that I don't think you can really stop people from traveling. These patients will show up in any country in the world, but China is quite vulnerable," Piot said.

"The issue is: What is the quality, the standard of infection control? In public hospitals in China, the ones that I've visited, the level of [infection control](#) is very poor," he said.

More than 8,600 people have entered China's southern Guangdong province from Ebola-affected areas since August, and there are dozens of flights a month. All arriving from those areas are monitored for three weeks after they enter China and are to be immediately quarantined if they run a fever, according to Health Ministry guidelines.

Piot said China's controls for infectious diseases have improved and authorities have become more open about public health risks since severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, broke out in southern China in 2002. SARS infected about 8,000 people worldwide, killing

nearly 800.

China is also stepping up aid, providing \$86 million, to the three West African countries at the heart of the crisis and has sent nearly 200 medical staff.

Piot is a board member of the Global Health Innovative Technology fund, a collaboration supported by the Japanese government, Japanese pharmaceutical companies and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation that funds research into treatments for malaria, tuberculosis, dengue and other so-called neglected tropical diseases. Piot said that despite the urgency of the crisis, it was crucial that funds going to those efforts not be diverted to work on Ebola.

Japan has pledged \$40 million so far to help combat the Ebola outbreak, but Piot said more is needed.

"I appeal to Japan to contribute from their very rich tradition, in all senses of the word of humanitarian assistance," he said. "When there is a humanitarian crisis, there is always money, and rightly so. Ebola is in that category."

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