

WHO eyes mass Ebola vaccines by mid-2015

October 24 2014, by Jonathan Fowler

Hundreds of thousands of Ebola vaccine doses could be rolled out to west Africa by the middle of next year, the World Health Organization said Friday, after new cases of the killer virus were reported in New York and Mali.

"All is being put in place to start efficacy tests in the affected countries as early as December," WHO assistant director general Marie-Paule Kieny said, adding that several hundred thousand doses could be available in the "first half" of 2015.

Kieny's comments came after closed-door talks on Thursday to try to find a vaccine to beat the disease that has ravaged Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and killed almost 4,900 people.

Fears the haemorrhagic virus could spread further were stoked with confirmed cases in New York city and the west African nation of Mali, adding urgency to the hunt for a cure.

"A vaccine is not the magic bullet, but when ready, it may be a good part of the effort to turn the tide of the epidemic," Kieny said.

'Real-world' tests

Hopes are centred on experimental vaccine rVSV, with doses arriving in Geneva for a new round of trials, and ChAd3, made by British company GlaxoSmithKline.

There are five other potential vaccines in the pipeline, Kieny said.

Whichever proves its mettle in trials, WHO hopes to send huge numbers of doses to Africa for "real-world" tests.

There is currently no licensed cure for Ebola, which is transmitted through close contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person or someone who has died from the disease.

New York on Thursday confirmed the city's first case of Ebola, with a doctor testing positive after returning from treating patients in Guinea, the epicentre of the world's worst outbreak of the disease.

Craig Spencer was placed in isolation at Manhattan's Bellevue Hospital Center, officials said.

In Mali, health authorities said a two-year-old girl who travelled to neighbouring Guinea with her grandmother, had tested positive.

The toddler's condition "is improving thanks to early [intervention](#)", Health Minister Ousmane Kone said in a television interview.

The WHO—which said this week the spread of the virus remains of "great concern"—said the local authorities were tracing everyone who had contact with the girl and her grandmother, with 43 people put under observation.

New York fears

With [health workers](#) in Spain and Texas already having caught Ebola from patients originally infected in west Africa, New York mayor Bill de Blasio insisted the city was fully prepared to stop the disease in its tracks.

"We want to state at the outset, (this) is no reason for New Yorkers to be alarmed. Ebola is an extremely hard disease to contract."

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said city officials had already identified four people believed to have been in contact with the doctor, who worked for the charity Doctors Without Borders, also known by its French acronym MSF.

He said he did not expect a repeat of the situation in Dallas, where hospital staff appeared to have been caught offguard by the arrival of the disease.

"Dallas was caught before they could really prepare. We had the advantage of learning from their experience," Cuomo said.

In Ivory Coast, up until now Ebola-free, a hunt was going on for a health worker from Guinea who may have fled across the border after taking fright when a patient he treated died.

Meanwhile, EU leaders agreed to boost aid to combat Ebola in west Africa to one billion euros (\$1.3 billion).

"We're in a race against time on Ebola and we must address both the emergency situation and at the same time have a long term response," Commission head Jose Manuel Barroso said Thursday.

African countries have also pledged to send more than 1,000 health workers to the most severely-hit countries.

Need for reinforcements

With almost 10,000 people now infected, African Union chief Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma said the regional bloc was responding to an

urgent need for medical reinforcements.

A lack of skilled medical staff has been one of the major obstacles in the battle against Ebola.

Health workers have paid a heavy price in the fight against the epidemic, with 244 deaths out of 443 cases.

The WHO said after an emergency meeting on Ebola this week that the situation in the worst-hit countries was worrying as cases increase exponentially.

"It has been terrifically difficult to get enough health workers—both domestic health workers as well as international health workers—and this continues to be one of the major challenges," said its deputy chief Keiji Fukuda.

Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Paul Allen—who has already dipped into his vast personal fortune to help the WHO deal with the crisis—said Thursday he was upping his donation to \$100 million.

The tech billionaire, who founded Microsoft with Bill Gates, said some of the money will be used "to increase the WHO's capacity to coordinate the logistics required to transport international aid workers," according to a statement.

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