

Senegal declared Ebola-free: WHO

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Senegal is officially free of Ebola with the benchmark of 42 days passing without any new cases, the World Health Organization said Friday.

But the country is not out of danger, given its location in Ebola-hit West Africa and proximity to the worst-hit countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, it said.

"WHO officially declares the Ebola outbreak in Senegal over and commends the country on its diligence to end the transmission of the virus," the UN health agency said in a statement.

Senegal's only confirmed Ebola case was a student who travelled by road from neighbouring Guinea—where the outbreak began in December—who crossed the border just before it was closed on August 21.

The man, who had had contact with an Ebola patient in Guinea, was confirmed as having the highly contagious and deadly disease on August 29.

Thanks to rapid care, he recovered by September 5, and returned to Guinea two weeks later.

But Senegal could not be declared officially Ebola-free until two full 21-day incubation periods of the disease had elapsed.

"Senegal's response is a good example of what to do when faced with an imported case of Ebola," WHO said, lauding the government for having "reacted quickly to stop the disease from spreading".

Senegal's response plan included identifying and monitoring 74 close contacts of the patient, prompt testing of all suspected cases, stepped-up surveillance at border posts and nationwide public awareness campaigns, the UN agency underlined.

WHO also dispatched a team of epidemiologists to work alongside health ministry workers as well as medical charity Doctors Without Borders and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Senegal has maintained a high level of active 'case finding' for 42 days—twice the maximum incubation period of Ebola virus disease—to detect possible unreported cases of infection," WHO said.

"While the outbreak is now officially over, Senegal's geographical position makes the country vulnerable to additional imported cases of Ebola virus disease," it warned.

"It continues to remain vigilant for any suspected cases by strict compliance with WHO guidelines," it added.

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