

After alarm, Lebanese man tests negative for Ebola (Update)

October 23 2014, by Diaa Hadid

A Lebanese man who arrived in Beirut from West Africa believing he may have Ebola was reassured by doctors that he is disease free but was still taken into a hospital quarantine on Thursday as a practice run to check the country's preparedness, a health official said.

The case initially raised concerns because it was announced by the health minister, Wael Abu Faour, who said earlier in the day that Lebanon had quarantined a man suspected of having Ebola. The announcement came after days of warnings by the government that the country was at a high risk of exposure to the disease.

It had also raised concerns because the man arrived from an unspecified West African country three days ago, and reported himself to hospital with what he thought were symptoms of Ebola.

But an initial interview with the man showed that he was unlikely to have contracted Ebola, said physician Pierre Abi Hanna, specialist in infectious diseases at the Rafik Hariri hospital.

Still, he was placed under quarantine and tested, as a practice run.

"He is not a risk," said Abi Hanna. "We took it as it as a suspected case for exercise ... This is a very serious issue, so it served to test our preparedness."

The hospital has set up a four-bed isolated unit to deal with contagious

diseases such as Ebola.

The minister, Abu Faour, could not be reached for clarification but he later issued a statement to state-run media, saying the man was found to have tested negative for Ebola and would leave the hospital.

Thousands of Lebanese live in West African nations, including Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone—countries where Ebola has killed more than 4,500 people so far.

The Lebanese government warned earlier this week that the country is at a high risk of exposure to the disease because of its large diaspora in West Africa.

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Also this week, Lebanon established new surveillance measures to spot suspected cases. All planes arriving from West African countries are being diverted to the same runway, where health officials are checking arriving passengers for symptoms of the disease. Lebanese nationals who don't display symptoms must still follow up with the health ministry, Abu Faour said.

Hospitals that have more than 100 beds have been asked to create isolation units, the minister added.

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