

New concern worldwide as nurse in Spain gets Ebola

October 6 2014, by Connie Cass



Ashoka Mukpo is loaded into an ambulance, Monday Oct. 6, 2014, after arriving in Omaha Neb. Mukpo, an American video journalist who contracted Ebola while working in Liberia, was taken to Nebraska Medical Center, where he will be treated for the deadly disease. (AP Photo/The World-Herald, James R. Burnett)

Raising fresh concern around the world, a nurse in Spain on Monday

became the first person known to catch Ebola outside the outbreak zone in West Africa. In the U.S., the Obama administration considered ordering more careful screening of airline passengers arriving from the region.

Already hospitalized in the U.S., a critically ill Liberian man, Thomas Duncan, began receiving an experimental drug in Dallas. But there were encouraging signs for an American video journalist who returned from Liberia for treatment. Ashoka Mukpo, 33, was able to walk off the plane to a waiting ambulance, and his father said Muko's symptoms of fever and nausea appeared mild.

"It was really wonderful to see his face," said Dr. Mitchell Levy, who talked to his son over a video chat system at Nebraska Medical Center.

In Spain, the stricken nurse had been part of a team that treated a priest who was flown home to Spain from Sierra Leone to be treated for Ebola. The 69-year-old priest died in the hospital.

The nurse's only symptom was a fever, but the infection was confirmed by two tests, Spanish health officials said. She was being treated in isolation, while authorities drew up a list of people she had had contact with.

Medical workers in Texas were among Americans waiting to find out whether they had been infected by Duncan, the African traveler.

In Washington, the White House continued to rule out any blanket ban on travel from West Africa, saying the best way to protect Americans was to end the outbreak there. To that end, the U.S. military was working on the first of 17 promised medical centers in Liberia and training up to 4,000 soldiers this week to help with the Ebola crisis.

The U.S. is equipped to stop any further cases that reach the United States, said White House spokesman Josh Earnest.



Spain's Health Minister Ana Mato pauses during a news conference on the first reported incident of Ebola transmission outside Africa, in Madrid, Spain, Monday, Oct. 6, 2014. A Spanish nurse who treated a missionary for the disease at a Madrid hospital tested positive for the virus, Mato said Monday. The female nurse was part of the medical team that treated a 69-year-old Spanish priest who died in a hospital last month after being flown back from Sierra Leone, where he was posted. (AP Photo/Paul White)

"The tragedy of this situation is that Ebola is rapidly spreading among populations in West African who don't have that kind of medical infrastructure," Earnest said.

About 350 U.S. troops were already in Liberia, the Pentagon said, to

begin building a 25-bed field hospital for [medical workers](#) infected with Ebola. A torrential rain delayed the start of the job on Monday.

The virus has taken an especially devastating toll on health care workers, sickening or killing more than 370 of them in the hardest-hit countries of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone—places that already were short on doctors and nurses before Ebola.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry urged the U.S. government to begin screening air passengers arriving from Ebola-affected nations, including taking their temperatures.

Perry stopped short, however, of joining some conservatives who have backed bans on travel from those countries.

Federal health officials say a travel ban could make the desperate situation worse in the afflicted countries, and White House spokesman Earnest said it was not currently under consideration.

Southwest Airlines CEO Gary Kelly said he saw no need for additional screening at airports and noted that airlines already are cleaning planes frequently under FAA standards.



Diana Mukpo, mother of Ashoka Mukpo, speaks to the media Monday, Oct 6, 2014, on the treatment of her son, at a news conference in Omaha, Neb. Mukpo arrived at the Nebraska Medical Center's specialized isolation unit Monday, where he will be treated for the deadly disease. He is an American video journalist who was working in Liberia as a freelance cameraman for NBC News when he became ill last week. (AP Photo/Dave Weaver)

Airlines have dealt with previous epidemics, such as the 2003 outbreak in Asia of SARS, or severe acute respiratory syndrome.

"Now it's Ebola," Kelly said. "We are always on the alert for any kind of infectious disease."

The U.S. didn't ban flights or impose extra screening on passengers during the SARS outbreak or the 2009 swine flu pandemic. Both of those were airborne diseases that spread more easily than the Ebola virus, which is spread by contact with bodily fluids.

The CDC did meet many direct flights arriving from SARS-affected countries, to distribute health notices advising travelers that they might

have been exposed, how they could monitor their health and when to call a doctor.

Canadian health authorities attempted various methods of screening arriving passengers for SARS, including sometimes checking for fever. Authorities later reported that five SARS patients entered Canada in three months, but none had symptoms while traveling through airports.

Attempting entry screening for a disease with a long incubation period "is like they're looking for a needle in a haystack," said Dr. Amesh Adalja, an infectious disease specialist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Ebola symptoms can appear up to 21 days after infection.

The SARS death rate was about 10 percent, higher for older patients. Its new relative MERS, now spreading in the Middle East, appears to be more deadly, about 40 percent. About half of people infected with Ebola have died.

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