

Cuba says doctor catches Ebola in Sierra Leone

November 19 2014, by Michael Weissenstein



In this Sept. 24, 2014, file photo, nurse Dalila Martinez, trainer of the Cuban medical team to travel to Sierra Leone, washes her gloved hands during a practice drill at a training camp, in Havana, Cuba. Cuba's health ministry is sending more than 160 health workers to help stop the raging Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone in early October. Cuba says a member of the 165-member medical team it sent to fight Ebola in Sierra Leone has been diagnosed with the disease. (AP Photo/Ladyrene Perez, Cubadebate,File)

A member of the 165-member medical team Cuba sent to fight Ebola in

Sierra Leone has been diagnosed with the disease, according to state media.

Dr. Felix Baez Sarria is being treated by British doctors in Africa but he will be transferred to a special unit in Geneva at the recommendation of the World Health Organization, Cuban state media said, citing the island's Ministry of Public Health.

Cuba won global praise for sending at least 256 [medical workers](#) to Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea to help treat Ebola patients. State officials have emphasized the medics' high state of readiness for the mission, saying the doctors, nurses and support staff received weeks of instruction in protective measures and equipment.

Once in Africa, the Cubans got two to three weeks of additional training before heading into the field. They were to be quarantined in Africa for weeks at the end of their six-month mission before returning to Cuba.

State media said that Baez, an internal medicine specialist, came down with a fever of more than 100 degrees on Sunday and was diagnosed with Ebola the following day.

Cuban officials did not say how he caught the disease or immediately release any other information about the case, the first reported among the health workers the island sent to Africa.

Early symptoms of Ebola include fever, headache, body aches, cough, stomach pain, vomiting and diarrhea, and patients aren't contagious until those begin. The virus requires close contact with body fluids to spread so [health care workers](#) and family members caring for loved ones are most at risk.

Ebola has killed more than 5,000 people in the west African countries of

Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.

Cuba is one of the largest global contributors of medical workers to the fight against Ebola, a commitment that has drawn rare praise from the U.S. and focused worldwide attention on the island's unique program of medical diplomacy, which deploys armies of doctors to win friends abroad and earn billions a year in desperately needed foreign exchange.

Cuba has more than 50,000 medical workers in more than 60 countries, many in nations like Brazil that pay hundreds of millions a year for their services. Others are on humanitarian missions that generate good will abroad.

Despite a recent set of pay raises, most Cuban doctors' salaries don't top \$75 a month, less than many workers in tourism or other sectors that bring in money from abroad. The foreign missions almost uniformly offer the chance to earn extra pay, in many cases enough to buy a bigger home or new car.

Critics of Cuba's communist government have accused it in the past of exploiting the doctors by giving them only a small portion of the money paid for their services and keeping the rest.

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