

Doctor working in Sierra Leone is Italy's first Ebola case (Update)

November 21 2014

An Italian doctor has contracted Ebola in Sierra Leone and is being flown back to Rome for specialist treatment, the health ministry said Monday.

The ministry said the doctor, the first Italian to contract the disease, would arrive in Rome late Monday or early Tuesday and be hospitalised at the Lazzaro Spallanzani national institute for infectious diseases.

The doctor was working for the charity Emergency at a clinic for Ebola victims when he contracted the disease, which has killed more than 5,000 people in its latest outbreak in west Africa.

"We can reassure his family that the doctor is feeling well," Health Minister Beatrice Lorenzin said in a statement.

"He did not have a fever or other symptoms during the night and this morning he had his breakfast."

The charity said the doctor had developed some unspecified Ebola symptoms but was in a "good general condition".

The more serious symptoms of Ebola can take weeks to develop.

The World Health Organization has reported a fatality rate of 70 percent in the current outbreak, the worst ever.

But the handful of Western health workers who contracted the disease and been quickly evacuated have so far all survived.

It has been a different story for local healthcare workers with 337 having died, according to WHO figures.

The disease can only be spread through direct contact with bodily fluids of an infected parent. Sweating as a result of fever and vomiting are common amongst patients, putting nurses and doctors treating them at risk.

Emergency said all its staff in Sierra Leone had been trained in the meticulous hygiene measures required to avoid contamination.

"However no healthcare in such a serious epidemic can be considered completely risk-free," it said in a statement.

"The situation in Sierra Leone is alarming: the epidemic is still widening with 100 new cases a day. According to the World Health Organization there are more than 5,000 people with Ebola in the country but the real figures could be much higher."

Figures released by the WHO on Friday put the number of cases registered in Sierra Leone at 6,190, with 1,267 deaths.

The former British colony has been among the countries worst affected by the outbreak of one of the deadliest viruses known to man, along with Liberia and Guinea.

Emergency is a humanitarian organisation founded by celebrated heart surgeon Gino Strada which specialises in providing medical care including emergency operations in conflict and crisis zones.

As well as its clinic in Freetown, Sierra Leone is has operations in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Iraq and Sudan, among others.

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