

New Ebola death hits Mali as Liberia hails drop in cases

November 12 2014, by Orind Cooper

A second person from Mali has died from Ebola, just as hardest-hit Liberia hailed a dramatic drop in infections and the last-known sufferer in the United States was declared cured on Tuesday.

The death of a nurse who had treated an Ebola patient from neighbouring Guinea came as a blow to authorities in Mali, just as they were beginning to lift quarantine restrictions on more than 100 people exposed to the country's first victim of the virus.

The nurse had treated a Guinean patient at a clinic in the capital Bamako who was suffering from kidney failure and later died, medical sources said late Tuesday. Authorities now believe he had Ebola.

The case has raised fears of further contamination in Mali as the infection was unrelated to the country's only other Ebola fatality, that of a two-year-old girl.

In Liberia there was better news as assistant health minister Tolbert Nyenswah said new cases had dropped from a daily peak of more than 500 to around 50, confirming tentative announcements by experts worldwide of an apparent slowdown in the epidemic.

"The numbers of cases are reducing," he told AFP, although he added that new cases were still emerging across the country.

The largest Ebola outbreak on record has killed some 5,000 people, with

Liberia hit hardest and the contagion still raging in neighbouring Sierra Leone and Guinea.

The virus kills around 70 percent of its victims, often shutting down their organs and causing unstoppable bleeding.

On Tuesday, Morocco was stripped of hosting football's Africa Cup of Nations and flung out of the competition after insisting that it wanted to postpone the tournament due to fears over the virus.

New York patient 'cured'

In New York, the last known Ebola patient in the United States was released from hospital on Tuesday after being declared cured.

Craig Spencer, a 33-year-old emergency room doctor who contracted the virus while treating infected people in West Africa, appeared at a press conference with Mayor Bill de Blasio to announce he had been discharged from hospital.

"New York City's first and only Ebola case is successfully treated. Dr Spencer is Ebola-free and New York City is Ebola-free," de Blasio proclaimed at the hospital, to cheers and applause.

Spencer said he was "healthy and no longer infectious".

"My early detection reporting and now recovery from Ebola, speaks to the effectiveness of the protocols that are in place for health staff returning for from West Africa," he said.

The US has treated nine victims of the virus, which spreads through contact with infected bodily fluids.

A total of 289 people in New York continue to be monitored for possible Ebola symptoms, including Spencer's fiancée and staff who helped treat the doctor.

'Still skyrocketing' in Sierra Leone

The White House has been at the forefront of the international response to the outbreak, committing hundreds of millions of dollars and announcing plans for Ebola treatment units across Liberia.

The first US-built centre opened on Monday in Tubmanburg, around 70 kilometres (45 miles) northwest of the capital Monrovia.

The day before the announcement of the new Malian case, the World Health Organization (WHO) said it had released from isolation 25 of more than 100 people thought to have come into contact with country's first victim.

Two-year-old Fanta Conte died after returning from a trip to Guinea. The infection sparked panic as the toddler had travelled by bus and taxi with her grandmother, sister and uncle, making frequent stops on a trip of more than 1,200 kilometres (750 miles).

They also spent two hours in the capital Bamako, visiting relatives in a house of 25 people.

In Sierra Leone, WHO spokeswoman Winnie Romeril said the outbreak had stabilised in some areas but was "still skyrocketing" in the west of the country.

While Kenema, the eastern city at the epicentre of the epidemic, has not recorded new cases for three weeks, the capital Freetown and the nearby town of Hastings are still battling a serious outbreak, Romeril told AFP.

She said the official nationwide death toll of 1,133 was a gross underestimate and the real caseload was likely five times the official figure.

"It's not a cover-up by authorities, (it's) just people don't report their cases. This is a serious problem—they want to keep the bodies and organise traditional burials," she said.

The Gambia, which remains Ebola-free, announced Tuesday it had reopened its land borders to travellers from Sierra Leone and the other Ebola-hit nations.

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