

Ebola returns to Europe with first case diagnosed in Britain (Update 3)

December 29 2014

A healthcare worker recently back from Sierra Leone was diagnosed with Ebola on Monday by doctors in Scotland's largest city, the first diagnosis of the deadly virus in Britain during the current outbreak.

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon confirmed that the patient was a female health worker who had been working on the "front-line" with Ebola patients, and was currently in a stable condition in hospital.

Save the Children later confirmed she was a National Health Service employee working for the charity.

The patient returned to Scotland late Sunday via Casablanca and London Heathrow, arriving at Glasgow Airport at around 11:30 pm local time (2330 GMT), according to a Scottish government press release.

She was admitted to Gartnavel Hospital campus Monday after feeling unwell and placed in isolation at 7:50 am.

"All possible contacts with the patient are now being investigated and anyone deemed to be at risk will be contacted and closely monitored," said the government.

"However, having been diagnosed in the very early stages of the illness, the risk to others is considered extremely low."

Alastair McConchie from the Scottish health service explained that the

patient had been transferred using a specialist ambulance service and was "not showing any great clinical concern".

The patient was being treated in the hospital's Brownlee Unit for Infectious Diseases but a transfer was being arranged to move her to the high level isolation unit in London's Royal Free hospital "as soon as possible", according to protocol laid down by the government in London.

British Prime Minister David Cameron later said that "all measures would be taken to protect public health".

The Scottish government is currently contacting the 71 other people onboard the British Airways flight from London to Glasgow, but stressed there was "negligible risk" as the patient "displayed no symptoms" of the type that could cause transmission.

"Our first thoughts at this time must be with the patient diagnosed with Ebola and their friends and family. I wish them a speedy recovery," Sturgeon said at a press conference.

"Scotland has been preparing for this possibility from the beginning of the outbreak in west Africa and I am confident that we are well prepared."

Patient screened at Heathrow

Sturgeon confirmed that she had earlier chaired a meeting of the Scottish government's "resilience committee" and that she was working closely with Cameron.

British Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt also chaired a meeting of the Cobra emergency committee, saying afterwards that the government would review the "procedures and protocols" of NHS workers and other

government staff working in Sierra Leone.

Scotland remains part of the United Kingdom following September's referendum, but has autonomy over its health service.

However, it has agreed to send any Ebola patients to the highly-specialised London unit.

Will Pooley, a British nurse, was treated there using the experimental ZMapp drug earlier this year after being diagnosed with Ebola in Sierra Leone.

He recovered and has since returned to the country to help fight the disease.

Sturgeon revealed that the patient diagnosed in Glasgow had been screened when leaving Sierra Leone and also when transferring at Heathrow, but had shown no signs of infection.

"It would appear she has been diagnosed at a very early stage before symptoms were manifesting themselves," said the first minister.

The last Ebola patient in Europe was a Nigerian UN peacekeeper who was cured after being brought to the Netherlands for treatment.

He was flown there at the request of the World Health Organization in a specially equipped plane and treated at the university hospital in the central city of Utrecht.

Spanish nurse Teresa Romero in October became the first person to be diagnosed with the disease within the European Union.

The death toll from the Ebola outbreak in west Africa has risen to 7,842

out of 20,081 cases recorded, the World Health Organization said Monday.

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