

Ebola nurse treated in London as Sierra Leone rate rises

December 30 2014, by Robin Millard

A British nurse who contracted Ebola in west Africa was being treated in a specialist London hospital on Tuesday as infection rates grew again in eastern parts of Sierra Leone where the outbreak had subsided.

The volunteer, who returned Sunday from a treatment facility in Kerry Town in Sierra Leone run by the Save the Children charity, was transferred overnight from a Glasgow hospital in a Royal Air Force plane.

British media named her as Pauline Cafferkey, a nurse who was part of a 30-strong team of medical volunteers sent to Sierra Leone last month.

In an emotional diary written for The Scotsman newspaper, Cafferkey talked about her work at the facility, including meeting an orphan boy.

"The sad thing is that this is a regular occurrence and we see and hear of whole families being wiped out by this awful disease," Cafferkey wrote.

It is the first time someone has tested positive for Ebola in Britain and she is the second to be treated for the virus in the country after fellow nurse William Pooley, who made a full recovery earlier this year and has since returned to Sierra Leone.

The world's deadliest-ever outbreak, which has killed 7,842 people out of 20,081 cases, has been centred on Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea in west Africa.

In October, a Spanish nurse who treated two Ebola-infected Spanish missionaries became the first person to be diagnosed with the disease in Europe and the first to contract it outside of Africa.

Around 100 people have been tested for Ebola in hospitals across England alone so far this year, with all of them testing negative so far.

A second person returning from the affected region was being tested for the virus in Cornwall in southwest England, with results expected Wednesday, and a third, also a healthcare worker, was to be tested in Aberdeen, Scotland.

Officials said that as far as they knew neither of the two had contact with the confirmed case.

The new case is being treated at the Royal Free Hospital in London, which has a high-level isolation unit ready to handle Ebola cases and equipped with its own ventilation system to avoid contagion.

The patient had travelled to Glasgow from Sierra Leone on Sunday, via Casablanca in Morocco.

Health authorities said they had contacted 63 of the 70 people who were on the plane with her on the last leg of her journey from London Heathrow Airport to Glasgow.

The National Health Service worker was admitted to hospital on Monday after feeling feverish.

"She did not have the symptoms that make us worried about transmission before she was in the isolation facility in Glasgow," said Professor Paul Cosford from the Public Health England agency.

Ebola is transmitted through contact with bodily fluids and officials emphasised that the risk of the virus spreading was "negligible".

Chief medical officer Sally Davies revealed that the patient may be given the blood plasma from survivors, including Pooley, containing antibodies that should be able to fight the disease.

New cases in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's deputy government spokesman Abdulai Bayratay defended screening measures in place.

"The screening process she went through at the Lungi International Airport was of quality standard and as far as was detected, she left the country without any symptoms of Ebola," he told AFP.

But British medic Martin Deahl, who said he had travelled with Cafferkey from Sierra Leone, criticised what he called the "shambolic" testing process at Heathrow.

"They ran out of testing kits and didn't seem to know what they were doing," he told The Daily Telegraph newspaper.

In Sierra Leone, a five-day Christmas lockdown in the north aimed at preventing new Ebola infections ended on Monday.

However, Ebola infections have increased in the diamond-rich Kono district in the country's east, where the infection rates had been decreasing.

Meanwhile scientists said insect-eating bats that inhabited a hollow tree in a remote village in Guinea may have been the source of the epidemic.

The first death was that of a two-year-old boy who died in the village of Meliandou in December 2013.

Reporting in the journal *EMBO Molecular Medicine*, scientists led by Fabian Leendertz at Berlin's Robert Koch Institute said the contamination may have come from a tree 50 metres (yards) from the boy's home.

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