S Leone Ebola lockdown ends as new cases surface

December 30 2014

A Christmas lockdown in northern Sierra Leone aimed at preventing new Ebola infections in the country with the world's most cases ended on Monday.

The authorities did not make any official assessment but promised a statement by the end of the week.

The five-day lockdown was part of intensified government efforts to contain the epidemic, with many public Christmas and New Year celebrations also banned.

Markets and shops were shut in the country's north on Thursday and travel between districts was strictly forbidden save for Ebola health workers and authorised personnel.

Except for Christmas Day Mass, no public gatherings were allowed.

Keifala Samura, a resident of the northern town of Makeni, said: "Banks and commercial shops resumed normal business this morning."

However, Ebola infections have increased in the diamond-rich Kono district in the country's east, the national broadcaster said.

Quoting updates from the National Ebola Response Centre (NERC), it said Kono had recorded 21 new Ebola cases on December 26 and 27.

Local officials quoted said the government had sent 11 more ambulances Sunday to Kono, which before had a fleet of only three.

"The Ebola situation remains a grave concern as new cases emerged in the past two days," the radio said.

"Three towns... have been identified as hotspots," it added.

Sierra Leone, which has overtaken Liberia as the country with the most infections, counted 9,409 cases and 2,732 deaths on December 27, the WHO said Monday.

On Christmas Eve, the death toll had been 2,655 and there were 9,203 cases.

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