

Unsafe burials increase in Ebola-hit countries: WHO

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Ebola-hit Sierra Leone and Guinea saw an increase in the last week in unsafe burials that risk spreading the disease, the World Health Organization reported.

In Guinea, there were 39 unsafe burials and in Sierra Leone, there were 45 reported in the week to February 15, WHO said in a report late Wednesday.

Ensuring safe burials of the highly contagious bodies of those who die from the virus has been a top priority in fight against the deadly virus.

WHO also warned that more than 40 new confirmed Ebola cases in the two countries had been identified only after the infected people had died in their communities, and not in treatment facilities.

"Not only have these individuals not received potentially life-saving treatment, but other members of the community have been put at greater risk of exposure" to Ebola, the UN agency pointed out in its latest situation report on the 14-month outbreak.

WHO said the number of "security incidents" had also risen in Liberia over the past week after people were misinformed that Ebola was present in shots used for routine vaccinations.

WHO did not provide details on what the security incidents were.

As of February 15, WHO said 23,253 people had been infected with Ebola and 9,380 had died, the vast majority of them in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Guinea had reported 52 new confirmed cases and Sierra Leone had reported 74 in the week leading up to Sunday, both showing a small decrease from the previous week.

Liberia, which for a long time was the hardest-hit country, meanwhile counted only two new confirmed cases in the four days to February 12.

Ebola, one of the deadliest viruses known to man, is spread only through direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person showing symptoms such as fever or vomiting.

People caring for the sick or handling the bodies of people infected with Ebola are especially exposed.

As of February 15, a total of 833 health workers were known to have contracted the virus and 488 of them had died, the WHO said.

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