

WHO reform needed after Ebola failure: experts

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The West African Ebola outbreak highlighted leadership failings of the World Health Organization (WHO), said analysts Thursday who called for sweeping reforms and a doubling of its budget to prevent "needless" deaths in future.

Researchers from the Washington-based O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law said the UN's [health](#) organ urgently needed an injection of cash and expertise to boost its capacity and credibility.

"Action now on WHO and other reforms to the global health system is crucial, before the political moment passes," the research institute's Lawrence Gostin and Eric Friedman wrote in *The Lancet* medical journal.

They called for the body's 2014-15 budget of less than \$4 billion (3.5 billion euros) to be doubled over five years, to allow it to attract and retain expert personnel.

They also proposed the creation of a separate contingency fund ready to be tapped into as soon as the next epidemic is identified.

"Inadequate epidemic preparedness funding has been and will continue to be, unwise," said the paper.

Earlier Thursday, the WHO said the Ebola death toll in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea now topped 11,000—almost half of the more than

26,500 people infected in the worst outbreak of the haemorrhagic virus ever recorded.

The WHO had previously acknowledged its response was slow.

Gostin and Friedman said the problem had several origins.

In May 2011, the WHO saw its budget slashed by \$500 million (440 million euros), the loss of 300 headquarter jobs and nearly two-thirds of its [emergency response](#) unit staff, they wrote.

The Regional Office for Africa lost nine of its 12 emergency response specialists.

All of this contributed to the WHO failing in its core function of leading and coordinating the global response to Ebola, wrote the duo, further hamstrung by "deficiencies" in international health regulations created to prevent cross-border disease spread.

"WHO fell short of its leadership responsibilities," said the paper.

"Health workers and funding needed immediately instead arrived slowly and unpredictably," and the epidemic "needlessly took more than 10,000 lives in one of the world's poorest regions."

The first case of the current epidemic appeared in a two-year-old child in Guinea in December 2013, but was misdiagnosed, and Ebola was only confirmed in that country on March 21, 2014, in Liberia two days later, and in Sierra Leone in late May.

The WHO declared a "[public health emergency](#) of international concern" on August 8 - weeks after the volunteer group Doctors Without Borders said on June 21 that Ebola was "out of control" and required a "massive

deployment of resources," according to the study.

Unless things changed drastically, the world would be just as ill-prepared for the next epidemic, said Gostin and Friedman—calling for an "empowered" WHO coupled with a strengthening of national health systems and regulations.

Approached for comment, the WHO said it will report later this month to the World Health Assembly, its decision-making body, about proposed changes to emergency response.

An independent evaluation of its Ebola response was also underway.

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