

Liberian official says corpse tests positive for Ebola

June 30 2015, by Jonathan Paye-Layleh

The corpse of a 17-year-old man has tested positive for Ebola in Liberia, but no other cases have been reported, the country's deputy health minister said late Monday.

Tolbert Nyenswah, who is also head of the country's Ebola response, told The Associated Press that the teenager died June 24 in Nedowein, a town situated close to the country's international airport, about 30 miles (48 kilometers) south of the capital, and was given a safe burial the next day.

Liberia had been the country hardest hit by last year's Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The World Health Organization declared Liberia to be Ebola free on May 9 after the country went 42 days without reporting a case.

"We have said over and over again there was possibility that there could be a resurgence of the virus in Liberia," Nyenswah said. "But our surveillance teams, our capacity is very strong."

The deadly virus, which has killed over 11,100 people mostly in West Africa in its worst outbreak ever, is hanging on stubbornly in Guinea, where the Ebola outbreak was first reported in March 2014, and in Sierra Leone.

It was not known how the 17-year-old contracted Ebola. The town where the teenager died is far from the borders with Sierra Leone and Guinea, so Nyenswah said they are investigating whether his case might be linked

to travel.

Specimens were taken from the corpse before burial, and the tests later came back positive.

"The only complication is that the person died before we tested the body as part of our surveillance system of testing living and dead people," Nyenswah said.

Nyenswah said teams are already doing contact tracing in the Nedowein area.

"There is no need for pandemonium; people should go about their normal business," he said. He called the Ebola testing of the young man's corpse "a success story for our surveillance system."

The Ebola Incident Management System team will meet on Tuesday to look into the incident, he said.

Fatoumata Lejeune-Kaba, spokeswoman for the U.N. Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, known as UNMEER, said in an exchange with the AP on Twitter, that there is enough resolve from Liberians and capacity in place to contain any spread of Ebola.

"A new confirmed case in Liberia is unfortunate because Liberians have been very serious about maintaining prevention measures, like washing hands stations in public places. But hopefully their experience with the crisis puts them in a better position to contain transmission," she said.

"I have always been impressed by how Liberians remain vigilant," she said. "They celebrated the end of the epidemic but always keeping in mind that their country would be vulnerable until Guinea and Sierra Leone make it."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had warned earlier this month that as long as there is one Ebola case in West Africa "all countries are at risk."

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