

Liberia announces two more confirmed Ebola cases (Update)

July 1 2015

Liberia said Wednesday a teenager who died of Ebola fever had spread the virus to at least two more people, confirming the first outbreak of the tropical disease for months.

Health official Cestus Tarpeh told AFP the infected pair had been in physical contact with the 17-year-old Ebola victim before his death in a village near the country's international airport, around an hour's drive southeast of Monrovia.

"We are still waiting for more results of blood tests," said Tarpeh, spokesman for the health department in Margibi County.

He added that a herbalist who had treated the boy had evaded the authorities and was on the run.

The news came a day after Health Minister Bernice Dahn announced the first case of Ebola in Liberia for around three months, warning that it was "likely that we will find additional cases".

The new outbreak comes with the country still reeling from a nightmarish epidemic which wrecked its health service and economy and left 4,800 Liberians dead.

Before the new cases Liberia had reported its last victim on March 20 and was declared Ebola-free by the World Health Organization on May 9.

Local media reported that the 17-year-old had fallen ill on June 21 and died three days later, although this has not been confirmed by the government.

There were no immediate details either on the two new cases, as epidemiologists scrambled Wednesday to trace and quarantine anyone else who may have had contact with the teenager.

'So scared'

The country's neighbours Guinea and Sierra Leone are both still battling the outbreak, which has killed more than 11,200 people across west Africa, but the coastal Margibi County where the teenager died is nowhere near either border.

The health ministry said it had no reason to believe the teenager had visited either country and the source of his infection remains a mystery.

US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Linda Thomas-Greenfield told a news conference broadcast online from Washington the new Ebola death was "a warning to us that the job is not done".

Residents in Monrovia, a crowded chaotic city of around one million people, spoke of their fears that the Margibi outbreak would develop into a full-blown epidemic.

"I am scared—I am so scared that I don't even know where to start," said Jeneba Freeman, 45, a stallholder in the capital's Redlight market.

Ebola is spread among humans via the bodily fluids of recently deceased victims and people showing symptoms of the tropical fever, which include vomiting, diarrhoea and—in the worst cases—massive internal haemorrhaging and external bleeding.

Experts are speculating that the latest victim could have been infected by an entirely new variation of the virus from an animal such as a fruit bat rather than by a human.

A more worrying possibility is that clusters of Ebola continue to smoulder under the surface, far from the gaze of local or international health authorities.

Infectious bodies

"We heard on radio that Ebola has turned around to come back to Liberia," said Samanta Blamo, 55, another stallholder at the Redlight market, where buckets of chlorinated water began to appear on Wednesday.

"This is why we are bringing our Ebola buckets. We were still washing our hands but only few buckets were here. Now everybody has one again, just like the way it was in 2014."

During the months of peak transmission from August to November last year Liberia was the setting for some of the most shocking scenes from the outbreak, by far the worst in history.

The country was reporting more than 300 new cases a week, with uncollected and highly infectious bodies piling up in the streets of Monrovia.

The health system—embryonic before the crisis, with some 50 doctors and 1,000 nurses for 4.3 million people—was devastated, losing 192 health workers out of 378 infected.

Schools remained shut after the summer holidays, unemployment soared as the formal and black-market economies collapsed and clinics closed

as staff died and non-emergency healthcare ground to a halt.

Parents found themselves on Wednesday mulling the dilemma of whether to curtail the end of an already hugely disrupted school year by keeping their children at home.

Patricia Sleboh, a mother-of-three, told AFP she would rather keep her children from classes than risk "losing them to Ebola".

© 2015 AFP

Citation: Liberia announces two more confirmed Ebola cases (Update) (2015, July 1) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-07-liberia-ebola-cases.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.