

World Bank warns of rising maternal deaths post-Ebola

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The World Bank warned Wednesday that the loss of health care workers amid the Ebola epidemic in western Africa could increase women's deaths from complications of pregnancy and childbirth.

An additional 4,022 deaths of women could be seen each year across Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the countries hardest hit by the recent Ebola outbreak, the Bank said in a report that looks at the impact beyond the epidemic's direct effects.

"The loss of health workers to Ebola could increase maternal deaths up to rates last seen in these countries 15-20 years ago," said Markus Goldstein, lead economist at the World Bank and co-author of the report, in a statement.

According to the report, doctors, nurses and midwives disproportionately died in the epidemic, which has killed more than 11,200 people in the past 18 months, most of them in western Africa.

For example, as of May, 0.1 percent of the entire population of Liberia had died from Ebola, compared with 8.1 percent of its health workers.

The loss of health workers to Ebola would likely result in significantly higher maternal mortality rates even after the three countries are declared free of Ebola: by 111 percent in Liberia, by 74 percent in Sierra Leone and by 38 percent in Guinea.

"Ebola has weakened already very fragile [health systems](#) in these countries," said David Evans, co-author of the report. "Ebola's devastating impact should be the catalyst to strengthen the health systems far beyond their pre-Ebola levels."

The report said 240 health workers need to be hired immediately across the three countries. According to the Millennium Development Goals, the countries need 43,565 doctors, nurses and midwives to achieve adequate health coverage, it noted.

Tim Evans, director of health, nutrition and population at the World Bank, called for "urgent investment" that would prioritize training [health workers](#) in the three countries.

"This is to ensure that Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone are not only equipped to deal with future deadly epidemics, but that every day, mothers have access to the quality health care they need that will save their lives and prepare them for a more promising future."

The report, "Healthcare Worker Mortality and the Legacy of the Ebola Epidemic" was published in The Lancet Global Health on Wednesday.

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