Medical Xpress

Three new confirmed cases in previously Ebola-free Liberia: WHO (Update)

November 20 2015

Three new cases of the deadly Ebola virus have been confirmed in Liberia, the country's health ministry and World Health Organization said Friday, after the nation was declared Ebola free in September.

An official in the West Africa country that has been devastated by the worst ever outbreak of the virus urged calm, insisting that health workers had the means to contain the latest outbreak.

"We are calling on the population not to panic because we have people capable of putting the situation under control," health ministry spokesman Sorbor George told reporters.

"Let everyone take the necessary measures to prevent the virus from spreading," he added.

WHO said the first confirmed case in the new outbreak was a 10-year-old boy who fell sick on November 14 and was hospitalised in the capital Monrovia three days later.

The other two patients are related to the boy.

Investigation ongoing

WHO's Ebola response chief, Bruce Aylward, told journalists in Geneva that initial investigations have not yet turned up a confirmed link

between the 10-year-old and another Ebola sufferer, leaving many questions unanswered as health officials try to figure out the origins of the new case.

"The child has no known history of contact with a survivor or having been at a funeral" where an Ebola victim was buried, Aylward added, a reference to the fact that secretions from the corpses of those who died from the virus are highly contagious.

"I'm sure as we start to move forward, we will see more clarity," the UN official assured, stressing that Liberia's emergency response system has improved drastically since the initial outbreak of the virus that wreaked havoc across parts of West Africa.

Aylward said that two of the boy's siblings had reported feeling ill over the last two days, but there was no confirmation that they were the new confirmed cases.

"His father and mother had transient illnesses in the last few weeks, so obviously that could be one of the lines of transmission," Aylward also said.

Liberia, where thousands died at the height of the epidemic last year, was first declared Ebola free in May, only to see the fever resurface six weeks later, and again in September.

Since the beginning of the outbreak, Liberia has registered more than 10,600 cases and 4,808 deaths, according to the latest situation report from the UN health agency published earlier this week.

According to the latest toll given by WHO, the epidemic that started in December 2013 has left more than 11,300 dead, mainly in the west African states of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, out of almost 29,000

cases.

Friday's news comes just days after the last known Ebola case in Guinea, a three-week old girl, had was declared cured on Monday, starting the clock on a 42-day countdown—twice the incubation period of the virus—before the country can be declared Ebola-free.

Sierra Leone was declared to have beaten the virus earlier this month.

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