

Poisoning appears cause of mystery Liberia illness: WHO

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Evidence suggests a mysterious illness that has killed 12 people in Liberia is linked to food or drink poisoning and is not a viral infection, the UN said Friday, confirming three new cases.

The World Health Organization said that as of Wednesday the number of patients had risen to 28, with the sickness still unexplained although Ebola and Lassa fever have been ruled out.

Results from ongoing tests at labs in the United States and Europe are still pending, but WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic told reporters in Geneva that "the overall risk of spread is low."

"These findings are indicative of a point source of infection", he added, explaining that the leading theory being investigated was "food, drink or water poisoning."

The fact that the cases appeared tied to one funeral further suggested that an isolated poisoning was to blame.

Liberia first started registering incidents of the mystery sickness on April 23, triggering memories of the devastating West African Ebola epidemic that began in late 2013.

WHO and medical charity Doctors Without Borders have said the warning system put in place in Liberia after the Ebola crisis prompted fast action following the recent deaths.

The unexplained illness was first seen in coastal Sinoe County and has since been registered in the capital Monrovia. It causes fever, vomiting, headaches and diarrhoea.

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