

'Largely prepared': Guinea vaccinates to stop Ebola spread

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Ebola virus. Credit: NIAID

A man in a navy suit grinned as he left an airbase in Guinea's capital Conakry on Wednesday after being vaccinated for Ebola, one of the first to receive the jab since the deadly disease re-emerged in the West African country.

He was among a handful of people to volunteer for an early Ebola

vaccination as part of a programme the government hopes will crush the outbreak by April.

The man had recently passed through the southeastern region where Ebola emerged earlier this month, he told AFP outside the airbase, which is serving as a vaccination centre.

"Since I learned that this disease reappeared, I've stayed away from my family," said the man, who requested anonymity.

Guinea recorded new Ebola cases on February 13 near the town of Gouecke, in the southeastern Nzerekore region, and declared an epidemic shortly after.

The re-emergence of the viral disease has evoked the spectres of the devastating 2013-2016 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, which left 11,300 dead in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Ebola causes severe fever and, in the worst cases, unstoppable bleeding. It is transmitted through close contact with bodily fluids, and people who live with or care for patients are most at risk.

But Guinea has reacted rapidly to its latest outbreak.

With support from the World Health Organization, medical workers on Tuesday began administering vaccines in Gouecke.

Vaccinations began the following day at a military airbase in Conakry, where 10 contact cases and four volunteers received jabs.

Halimatou Keita, the doctor in charge of vaccinations at the base, reassured worried-looking patients that they would have "no more worries" after getting vaccinated, an AFP journalist said.

At least five people have died in the latest outbreak so far, according to the country's health agency, although there is some confusion over the exact death toll.

Guinean health authorities have also reported 10 confirmed or probable Ebola cases, and are tracking 400 more contact cases.

'Six weeks'

Guinea's Health Minister Remy Lamah, as well as Georges Ki-Zerbo, the World Health Organization representative in the country, travelled to Gouecke for the start of the vaccine rollout this week.

"I think that in six weeks, we can be done with this disease," Lamah, who hails from the region, said during the trip.

He added, however, that he had spent much of the day persuading local leaders to overcome their hesitancy of the Ebola vaccine.

The vaccination campaign continued in the Nzerekore region on Wednesday, where contact cases and [medical staff](#) received jabs at the local hospital.

"We vaccinate contact cases first... and then all the staff, since they are on the front line in the response," hospital director-general Kaba Keita said through a facemask.

For his part, the head of Guinea's Ebola response, Moussa Konate, appears upbeat about the nation's chances of beating back the virus.

He told local press this week that health kits and food aid were reaching people in the southeast of the country, whom he added were well informed about preventive measures against Ebola.

"The population is largely prepared," he said.

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