

Ivory Coast records first case of Ebola: health minister

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A scanning electron micrograph of Ebola virus budding from a cell (African green monkey kidney epithelial cell line). Credit: NIAID

Ivory Coast has recorded a first case of Ebola, the health minister announced late Saturday, the first occurrence of the deadly disease in nearly three decades.

Officials at the Institut Pasteur had confirmed the case after testing

samples taken from an 18-year-old Guinean woman, Health Minister Pierre N'Gou Demba said on RTI state television.

She had left the city of Labe in Guinea by road, arriving in Ivory Coast on Wednesday, he added.

"This is an isolated and imported case," he said, adding that the patient was currently being treated in intensive care in Abidjan.

Ivory Coast already had doses of the vaccine against Ebola, which go to anyone who had been in contact with her, such as the medical staff treating her.

Prime Minister Patrick Achi had chaired an emergency interministerial meeting earlier Saturday, the minister added.

Appealing for calm, he said the authorities had already activated an emergency plan which included the identification and surveillance of anyone who had come into contact with the patient.

According to the World Health Organisation, this is the first case of Ebola in Ivory Coast since 1994.

'Immense concern'

On June 19, the World Health Organization declared an end to a four-month outbreak of Ebola in Guinea that claimed the lives of 12 people there.

But a statement from WHO Africa on Saturday said: "There is no indication that the current case in Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) is linked to the earlier outbreak in Guinea.

"Further investigation and genomic sequencing will identify the strain and determine if there is a connection between the two outbreaks," the statement added.

"It is of immense concern that this outbreak has been declared in Abidjan, a metropolis of more than four million people," Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO's Africa regional director, said in the statement.

"However, much of the world's expertise in tackling Ebola is here on the continent and Cote d'Ivoire can tap into this experience and bring the response to full speed."

The WHO said it was helping to coordinate a cross-border response, which included transferring 5,000 doses of Ebola vaccine from Guinea to Ivory Coast.

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.

In four decades, periodic Ebola outbreaks have killed around 15,000 people, all in Africa.

Its fatality rate in past outbreaks has varied between 25 and 90 percent.

But as the WHO pointed out: "There is now effective treatment available and if patients receive treatment early, as well as supportive care, their chances of survival improve significantly."

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