

Sierra Leone steps up measures to tackle Ebola outbreak

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Sierra Leone, one of three neighbouring west African countries facing an Ebola epidemic, has stepped up measures to fight the highly contagious and deadly disease, the health minister has said.

Miatta Kargbo said Thursday that the number of registered cases of [haemorrhagic fever](#) had risen to 246. Of these, 103 were confirmed to be Ebola and 26 had died.

Kargbo's figures were higher than those released on Wednesday by the World Health Organisation (WHO), which reported 92 cases of Ebola and 49 deaths.

The first ever Ebola outbreak to emerge in west Africa began early this year in southeast Guinea's forests and swiftly struck Liberia and Sierra Leone. A current spike in new cases in Guinea has caused concern.

Across the three countries, 337 people have died from Ebola, according to the WHO data released on Wednesday.

Kargbo told journalists that her figures showed that health workers "have access to places they had difficulty to access" in the past, including the remote Koindu and Kissi Teng chiefdoms in the eastern region.

Checkpoints to screen potential Ebola cases were now in place and "functional", the minister added, declaring that the local population had proven increasingly cooperative about taking tests.

Like other haemorrhagic fevers, Ebola causes high fever, vomiting, muscle pain and diarrhoea and can lead to organ failure and unstoppable internal bleeding.

It is spread by bodily fluids including sweat, which means that just touching an infected person can spread the virus.

There is no cure and the current strain of Ebola has a 90-percent death rate, according to medical teams, but patients can be isolated and at least treated for symptoms.

Sierra Leonean authorities have also set up 13 further checkpoints in the eastern towns of Kailahun, Kono and Kenema. Four health workers stand at each checkpoint with equipment including safety gloves, chlorine, disposable thermometers and mobile phones.

In some districts, local personnel are backed up by staff of the medical charity Doctors Without Borders, known by its French acronym MSF, which is also helping out in Guinea and Liberia.

The WHO is providing Sierra Leone with technical support in fighting the epidemic and recently trained ambulance drivers and medics in safely handling the sick and dead bodies.

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