

Beat: Health

Ebola death toll soars past 100 after Guinea reports 15 new deaths

-, 09.04.2014, 03:34 Time

USPA News - The death toll from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa soared past 100 on Tuesday after Guinea reported more than a dozen new deaths and a number of new cases, international health authorities said, warning that the outbreak is likely to continue for months. Speaking at a press conference in Geneva, Dr. Stéphane Hugonnet of the World Health Organization (WHO) said Guinea and neighboring Liberia had reported 178 cases including 111 deaths by late Wednesday afternoon.

This includes 157 cases with 101 deaths in Guinea and 21 cases with 10 deaths in Liberia. Hugonnet said there were still three districts of Guinea that are considered to be 'hotspots,' the main one being the district of Guekedou in the country's southeast, where the outbreak is believed to have started. "In those three areas there are active transmission chains that still produce cases," he said. By Wednesday, the World Health Organization had around 50 experts and support staff on the ground to help stop the spread of the disease, in addition to medical staff from local facilities and international charities. WHO is expected to send at least 17 more experts to the affected countries to strengthen the international response. "Clearly in Guinée forestière the outbreak is not over," Hugonnet said. "This is the epicenter of the outbreak and as long as this is not controlled there, there will be cases being exported from Guinée forestière to the rest of the country and, likely as it happened in Liberia, to other countries." Hugonnet called on people who may have been infected with Ebola to seek medical treatment, despite there not being a treatment and the disease killing up to 9 out of 10 patients. He said symptomatic treatment is "extremely important," such as patients being hydrated after they vomit and painkillers being given when patients have pain. "We fully expect to be engaged in this outbreak for another 2, 3, 4 months," Hugonnet added. Dr. Keiji Fukuda, the Assistant Director-General of the WHO's Health Security and Environment cluster, said the wide geographic dispersion of cases, including in a capital city, has made it a difficult situation. "This is one of the most challenging Ebola outbreaks we have ever faced," he said. Fukuda added: "This is an infection with a high fatality [rate], but it is also an infection which can be controlled ... This is a virus that is transmitted through body fluids or by close contact with an infected person. If people take the right precautions, this is an infection for which the transmission can be stopped and the risk of getting infected is low with the right precautions." Doctors Without Borders (MSF) earlier described the outbreak in Guinea and Liberia as an "unprecedented epidemic," though WHO spokesman Gregory Hartl emphasized the spread of the disease was not unusual as patients tend to travel to big cities in search of more effective treatment. The current outbreak in West Africa is the worst of its kind since an outbreak killed 187 people in the province of Kasai-Occidental in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2007. Ebola is a highly infectious disease and kills its victims in a very short time, though the virus can easily be confused with many other diseases. The signs and symptoms include high grade fever, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, headache, measles-like rash, red eyes, and in some cases bleeding from body openings. The virus, for which there is no cure or vaccine, can spread through direct contact with body fluids such as saliva, blood, stool, vomit, urine, and sweat but also through soiled linen used by an infected person. It can also spread by using skin piercing instruments previously used by an infected person or by touching the dead body of a person who died of Ebola. The first outbreak of Ebola in 1976 in Zaire - which is now the Democratic Republic of Congo - was also the deadliest, killing at least 280 people and sickening 38 others, putting the fatality rate at 88 percent. The Ebola outbreak in Uganda in 2000 was the largest ever recorded, killing 224 people and sickening at least 201 others.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2082/ebola-death-toll-soars-past-100-after-guinea-reports-15-new-deaths.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619