

Guinea declares Ebola epidemic, neighboring countries act

15 February 2021, by Carley Petesch



In this Nov. 20, 2014 file photo, an MSF Ebola health worker is sprayed as he leaves the contaminated zone at the Ebola treatment centre in Gueckedou, Guinea. Guinea has officially declared an Ebola epidemic Monday Feb. 15, 2021, after at least three people have died and others have been infected in the West African nation. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay-File)

Guinea has officially declared it has an Ebola epidemic after at least three people have died and four others have been infected in the West African nation.

Neighboring Sierra Leone and Liberia have put their citizens on high alert as the three West African nations battled the world's deadliest Ebola outbreak from 2014 to 2016, which began in Guinea and in which more than 11,300 people died.

Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio has flown to consult with Guinean President Alpha Conde.

Guinea's new Ebola outbreak occurred in N'Zerekore, in southern Guinea, where [health officials](#) detected suspicious cases of Ebola with

patients presenting symptoms of diarrhea, vomiting and bleeding. The sick had participated in the burial of a nurse on Feb. 1 in Gouake, according to Guinea's Minister of Health Remy Lamah, who added that the first investigation counted seven cases, all of people over the age of 25 years, including the two women and one male who have died.

"The government reassures the population that all measures are being taken to stem this epidemic as quickly as possible. It invites the populations of the affected areas to respect hygiene and prevention measures and to report to [health authorities](#) in the presence of suggestive signs," Lamah said in the ministry statement.

The epidemic was declared after a crisis meeting Sunday. All suspected cases have been isolated in N'Zerekore and Conakry, the capital. Investigations have begun, a treatment center has opened and supplies have been sent to the region.

Traditional funerals in which people wash and touch the body of the deceased facilitate the spread of Ebola. It usually jumps to humans from infected animals, such as bats, and then spreads between humans via direct contact with bodily fluids.

Liberia's president George Weah has mandated health authorities "to heighten the country's epidemiological surveillance and preventative activities" and also ordered health officials to "immediately engage communities in towns and villages bordering Guinea and increase anti-Ebola measures."

Sierra Leone has activated [emergency response systems](#) and heightened surveillance for Ebola at the already closed border with Guinea, it said.

International humanitarian and medical organizations are also racing to help prevent further spread of the virus.

The World Health Organization has said it is working to be sure that vaccines developed during the 2014 to 2016 outbreak, will be readily available as quickly as possible. Last month the World Health Organization said it was creating a global emergency stockpile of about 500,000 doses of the Ebola vaccine to help stamp out future outbreaks, but only 7,000 were available at the time of the statement. The Ebola vaccine being stockpiled is made by Merck.

"Time is of the essence. The resurgence of the virus in Guinea comes at the worst possible time when the country is already facing the COVID-19 pandemic," Mohammed Mukhier, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Regional Director for Africa said, adding there is hope with scientific advances. "Unless the response is swift, the health, economic and social impacts are likely to be immense for millions of people in a country with a relatively weak health system, and where more than half of the population lives below the poverty line."

The IFRC and Guinea Red Cross say teams that include more than 2,500 volunteers have been activated in Guinea to provide contact tracing, psychosocial support, water and sanitation.

The international medical organization Doctors Without Borders said it is also sending teams to combat the outbreak.

"We know from the past that the speed of response is important ... We also know that [community engagement](#) is vital, so we will be trying to get the right balance between responding quickly and taking steps to make sure the community is a willing and active participant in both prevention and response," said Frederik van der Schrieck, the organization's head of mission in Guinea.

Guinea's announcement comes more than a week after eastern Congo confirmed it has four cases of Ebola. The outbreaks in the two countries are not linked.

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