

Global Ebola Response Coalition
15 May 2015
Issues Discussed and Next Steps

The twenty-ninth meeting of the Global Ebola Response Coalition Core Group took place on 15 May. The main points covered in the meeting follow.

Status of the outbreak

1. Participants discussed the status of the outbreak. On 9 May, Liberia was declared Ebola-free. Liberia took four months to move from single-digit cases to zero, and in the best case scenario, it will take Guinea and Sierra Leone the same amount of time. However, ending the outbreak will likely prove to be more challenging in these two countries, as they still have deaths occurring in the community and will soon face the rainy season (neither of which was the case as Liberia was getting to zero).
2. The number of people newly diagnosed with Ebola in week ending 10 May was 9, with 7 in Guinea and 2 in Sierra Leone. The data of this week underscores the fact that the road to getting to zero will be bumpy. From the four days this week, already 23 people have been newly diagnosed with Ebola. The four prefectures in Guinea with people newly diagnosed with Ebola are Dubreka, Forécariah, Boké and Conakry; in Sierra Leone, the two people are from Western Area Urban. The increase in numbers is not surprising and is consistent with the fact that there were a number of deaths in the communities, which were anticipated to give rise to the disease.

Status of the response

3. Participants noted that the increased reports of people newly diagnosed with Ebola in the current week underscored the need to maintain a broad surveillance presence across the countries and to sustain surveillance activities for another six months.
4. Financing will continue to pose a serious challenge as responder organizations need to prepare for the rainy season, address new transmissions and keep the response on track to the end of the year. Participants emphasized the need for financial resources in order to sustain the current level of operations as UNMEER is transitioning out. A technical session of the World Health Assembly will include a discussion of the Ebola response and the financing required. Additionally, the heads of UN agencies, funds and programmes will be working next week to finalize the costing of UN country programmes for recovery.
5. Liberia. Participants noted that the President of Liberia has emphasized that they are not out of the woods and need to remain vigilant. Participants highlighted the need to expand capacity for maternal and child health care, as current facilities are overloaded. Measles vaccinations have commenced since the beginning of May.

6. Guinea. Teams have been deployed to Forécariah, Dubreka and Boké to map out transmission chains and examine ways to improve the response. The National Coordinator in Guinea reported that a campaign has been initiated to undertake Ebola sensitisation, improve contact tracing and increase work with the communities. Surveillance teams will be reinforced in Dubreka and Boké. A Canadian mobile laboratory was moved to Boké to allow for the rapid testing of samples without having to send them to Conakry. The rainy season and the political context will pose challenges for the response. Approximately 45% of burials are taking place in the communities and are not being reported to the IFRC; a scaling up of burial teams will be needed to ensure that IFRC will handle 100% of all burials. Over 400 health care workers have been vaccinated without any serious side effects. UNICEF has extended rural radio coverage and support for survivors.

7. Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, the people who have been newly diagnosed with Ebola are coming from known transmission chains. Outreach activities have focused on marginalised populations who do not have faith in the system nor in health workers. Activities have been undertaken to engage with women's groups and encourage women to share their experiences with other districts in Sierra Leone. The availability of information in the Moa Wharf area has enabled the adoption more precise strategy and an avoidance of a general quarantine. MSF has supported measles case management in 10 primary care health units. With support from the EU, UNICEF has provided health centres with essential non-Ebola related drugs.

Update on evaluations of the Ebola response

8. Based on a request by Member States, the WHO Director-General established a panel of outside independent experts to examine all aspects of WHO's response in the Ebola outbreak. This Panel (chaired by Dame Barbara Stocking) issued its first report which will be discussed with the World Health Assembly (WHA) on 19 May.

9. A representative from the Secretariat of the WHO Interim Assessment Panel provided an overview of the Panel's work to date. He explained that the WHO Panel's first report is intended to inform and guide the WHA discussions on a contingency fund and a global health work force. The key features of the report included an examination of the International Health Regulations and how they functioned during in the Ebola crisis, the role of WHO, and the nexus between the humanitarian and public health operational systems. The Panel expects to finalize and issue its report by July. The review of the International Health Regulations by a separate panel is expected to commence in July.

10. A representative from the Secretariat of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crises also provided an update on the Panel's work. The High-Level Panel convened a first meeting last week and met with UN agencies, senior UN management, NGOs, World Bank and experts. The next meeting of the Panel will be in mid-June in Geneva. It will visit the region in the first

half of August and return to New York in September. The Panel will aim to have a first draft of the report in November, which will be finalized by the end of the year. At present, the Panel is looking at a range of issues, including the Ebola response, non-Ebola epidemics, the global health architecture, hot spot mapping, preparedness, detection and alert, and financing.

Summary

11. In summary, the following issues were highlighted:

- Notwithstanding the wonderful news from Liberia, the Ebola outbreak is very much ongoing in the other affected countries.
- The challenges in Guinea are intense and the UN system remains committed to working with Guinean partners on the broad and detailed actions necessary to end the outbreak.
- In Sierra Leone, there is a more positive outlook and participants noted how resilience is being strengthened, particularly through working with women.
- Participants emphasized the ongoing need to work on safe and dignified burials, and community outreach, as well to recognize the challenge of non-Ebola health issues.
- The two panels established to study the Ebola response are grappling to understand a broad range of complex issues and seeking to make recommendations that will make the world better-equipped to deal with all forms of health crises.
- As the donors are dealing with many crises, it is necessary to ensure that the resources being requested are re-assessed at regular intervals and used as efficiently as possible.
