



PRESS RELEASE

UNMEER Chief says Ebola comeback in Liberia underscores need for rigorous testing

Monrovia, 2 July 2015 - The United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) warns of the need to maintain active surveillance in West Africa as new Ebola cases resurface in Liberia, nearly two months into the country being declared free of the virus.

The Government of Liberia announced three new confirmed Ebola cases since Sunday. The 17 year-old, diagnosed post-mortem on Sunday, is the country's first case of Ebola since it was declared free of the virus on 9 May 2015.

"The comeback of Ebola in Liberia was not unexpected with the virus still active in the region," says Peter Graaff, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER). "However, it clearly underscores the need for continued and rigorous surveillance in all three affected countries, including the systematic testing of patients with Ebola symptoms and systematic testing of dead bodies to ensure we don't let any cases slip us by."

UNMEER's Chief commends the swift revival of the Ebola response mechanism led by the Liberian government but noted the need for heightened surveillance in light of low reporting of suspected cases in recent weeks: "Testing should be systematic when patients' symptoms meet the criteria for Ebola which include fever, vomiting or diarrhea even if these symptoms are common with the rising number of malarial infections during this rainy season. The real test of how well the system still works will be in the next few weeks."

In the wake of new infections, Liberia has revived the daily Ebola emergency coordination chaired by its Deputy Health Minister, Tolbert Nyenswah. Since Sunday, 175 people have been listed as contacts and are being monitored. Thirty of the contacts are registered as high risk, four of whom were admitted for close follow up at the ELWA Ebola treatment unit where the two new cases were diagnosed.

Five families, 14 healthcare workers and the residents of Needowein, Margibi County outside of the capital Monrovia - the neighborhood where the teenager died - have agreed to be observed and monitored at home for 21 days and are receiving food and water support. Active contact tracing is planned for 42 days, double the incubation period of the virus.

Meanwhile, health screening has been reactivated at Liberia's international airport and between the counties of Bong, Grand Bassa, Margibi, and Montserrado.

"We can't let this be the case that brings back a major outbreak to Liberia," says Graaff. "The country has the treatment units, trained specialists, and the resources it needs to bring this to a close. We just need to keep pushing and I am glad to see that in motion."

Since the outbreak began, 27,479 confirmed, probable and suspected cases of Ebola have been reported in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. New cases in Guinea and Sierra Leone continue with over 20 weekly cases since the end of May, and infections arising from unknown sources.

For more information:

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