

Global Ebola Response Coalition
12 June 2015
Issues Discussed and Next Steps

The thirty-second meeting of the Global Ebola Response Coalition Core Group took place on 12 June. The main points covered in the meeting follow.

Status of the outbreak

1. Participants discussed the status of the outbreak. Participants confirmed that Liberia remained at zero cases and work on cross border issues is continuing. Liberian officials are sharing experiences on community engagement in Liberia with Guinean counterparts.
2. To date, there are 27,251 people diagnosed with Ebola and 11,163 Ebola-related deaths. The number of people newly diagnosed with Ebola in the week ending on 7 June is 31.
3. In Guinea, there are a number of positive epidemiological developments in Forécariah. The number of transmission chains has been halved from 14 to seven. The proportion of people newly diagnosed with Ebola who come from contact lists has increased. There has been a shrinking of the geographic scope of the transmission, which is now concentrated in four sub-prefectures. There have been flares in Boké and Durebka, but the numbers have been coming down, as there has been an improved understanding of the transmission chains. Anthropologists are undertaking painstaking work to build family trees and transmission chains. Overall, Guinea is now in a stronger position to respond to the outbreak.
4. In Sierra Leone, there has been an increase in the number of people newly diagnosed with Ebola but the transmission chains are being closely followed and are well understood. Participants also emphasized that within Sierra Leone, only two of 14 districts (Port Loko and Kambia) are currently reporting people diagnosed with Ebola. Of these two districts, only a minority of chiefdoms are affected. Therefore, the concerns regarding the numbers of people newly diagnosed with Ebola need to be viewed in this broader context.

Status of the response

5. Participants discussed the status of the response. Real progress is being made in the sites of the outbreaks in both countries, but flare-ups continue due to the movement of people and of bodies. A number of adjustments have been made to the response, including integrating anthropologists, moving response teams to the site of the outbreaks to work under the leadership of the national governments, and focusing on the transmission chains. There is a sense that the processes are working as they should but there continue to be serious challenges of the rainy season and movements of people and bodies. Both anthropological and epidemiological approaches are being combined to understand these transmission chains.

6. Concerns were expressed that the numbers of people newly diagnosed with Ebola have plateaued and there are insufficient personnel on the ground in Guinea to strengthen surveillance.
7. In Sierra Leone, there is an operation underway (“Operation Northern Push”) to target hotspots in Kambia and Port Loko. This operation will involve active case finding where there are hotspots and increasing alert systems in other chiefdoms. These strategies have emphasized the involvement of community leaders in the planning. In the districts with no transmissions, businesses will be permitted to re-open for limited, while safe and dignified burial practices will continue.
8. Participants cautioned against a top-down approach to social mobilization strategies. In view of continuing denial and resistance from the communities, it is important to ensure that social mobilization campaigns are relevant and realistic and that communities are involved in the planning.
9. Participants noted that the effectiveness of the response can be attributed to a collaborative approach across governments, international agencies and NGOs. This same approach needs to be applied to recovery, as the governments face re-building health systems in crisis.

Activities in Guinea-Bissau

10. There has been an emphasis on preparedness activities in Guinea-Bissau following the discovery of people with Ebola in the Boké prefecture in Guinea. WHO will be establishing two sub-offices in the border region to handle Ebola preparedness issues and will deploy additional technical staff over the next six months. The main areas of intervention include coordination, rapid response teams, infection prevention and control in the short-term. In the longer term, there will also be a focus on infrastructure, relating to the construction of latrines and safe water supplies.
11. Participants expressed concern that currently there is limited capacity in Guinea-Bissau in terms of planning and implementation. Many areas at risk in the border areas are inaccessible, particularly during the rainy season. National Red Cross societies will be strengthened through the recruitment of Portuguese-speaking staff and the translation of safe and dignified burial training manuals and protocols into Portuguese. IFRC is coordinating with partners to organize trainings on social mobilization in the islands off Guinea-Bissau, which are a common destination for fishing communities from Sierra Leone and Guinea.
12. Participants who worked on addressing Ebola when transmissions crossed the border from Guinea to Liberia emphasized that establishing a response capacity should not wait until people are diagnosed with Ebola. Priority should be given to building an Ebola treatment unit, fixing water systems and latrines, hiring health care workers for infection prevention and control, and putting in place burial teams that can be ready for deployment.

Any other business

13. It has been proposed that during the Secretary-General's International Ebola Recovery Conference on 10 July, there will be a side-event on Ebola Data Systems Strengthening and Coordination, focusing on communications, computing and data management systems and current gaps. The contact information for the focal point for this event will be provided to participants in the GERC once it has been confirmed.

14. Work is ongoing to clarify the critical resources required to end the Ebola outbreak, to minimize the amounts requested and to provide greater detail on how these resources will be used.

15. The report entitled "Making a Difference, The Global Ebola Response: Progress 2015" has been finalized and is available in English and French at the following websites:

https://ebolaresponse.un.org/sites/default/files/web_press_ebola_progress_report_en_sm.pdf
https://ebolaresponse.un.org/sites/default/files/web_ebola_progress_report_final_fr_sm.pdf

Summary

16. In summary, the following issues were highlighted:

- In Guinea, there is still transmission of the Ebola disease in several prefectures. However, the number of transmission chains appears to be reducing, and there are improvements in the understanding of the transmission chains and in the quality of contact tracing. There remains anxiety about the level of personnel in Guinea and the impact of the rains and floods.
- There is significant work underway in Sierra Leone in the national and district Ebola response centres, focusing on the chiefdoms. Overall, the number of households affected by Ebola is low and the majority of people diagnosed with Ebola are coming off contact lists.
- Social mobilisation campaigns are doing their best to avoid a top-down approach and to involve communities.
- Participants stressed that the response capacity (materials, vehicles, personnel, and burial teams) should be in place and ready before any outbreak begins in Guinea-Bissau.
- Once the outbreak is finished, the job is only just beginning. Systems are in crisis and there needs to be a collaborative approach to systems strengthening and recovery, including with improving data management systems. Community engagement and systems development focused on people and their well-being are essential.