

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

The thirty-third meeting of the Global Ebola Response Coalition Core Group took place on 19 June. The main points covered in the meeting follow.

Status of the outbreak

1. Participants discussed the status of the outbreak. To date, there are 27,331 people diagnosed with Ebola and 11,173 Ebola-related deaths. The number of people newly diagnosed with Ebola in the week ending on 14 June is 24, with 10 in Guinea and 14 in Sierra Leone.
2. In Guinea, the area affected by the outbreak is shrinking. There are still contacts leaving Forécariah, but they are being identified. The intensity of transmission has slowed in Boké and Dubréka where there had previously been substantial flares.
3. In Sierra Leone, although the number of people newly diagnosed with Ebola has remained constant, the quality of the contact tracing is improving weekly. As of 14 June, 93% of people newly infected with Ebola in Sierra Leone came from contact lists. The current cases link back to three transmission events, dating back to April 2015. The responders on the ground have a better idea of the transmission chains and how to refine the response strategies. The President has launched Operation Northern Surge, emphasizing contact tracing and monitoring and improving care for households under quarantine.

Status of the response

4. Participants discussed the challenges and opportunities of the response. They noted that while the rainy season will make transportation difficult, it will also discourage the population movement and thereby decrease risks of spread. Similarly, more people are staying at home during Ramadan.
5. Many participants noted that the coordination was working well and the response was moving in the positive direction. It will be critical to maintain the momentum and not reduce the capacities available for the response while the outbreak is still ongoing. Concerns were raised about the phenomenon of responder fatigue, given that many responders (particularly national staff in the field) have been working on Ebola for a year or more. It was agreed that this issue needs to be acknowledged and addressed, for example, through the development of initiatives to enable responders to take a break.
6. A number of participants emphasized the importance of using appropriate language and tone when discussing and implementing the response. Language characterizing response activities in militaristic terms and strategies of a punitive nature

should be avoided. Quarantines should be seen as a modality for enabling households to be isolated and to receive essential services rather than as punitive measures.

7. Some participants cautioned that the dynamics of national political processes might draw energy away from the response. Others noted that coordination with teams implementing vaccine trials could be improved to reinforce the work of responders and contribute to more effective implementation of the trials.

8. Observations relating to specific countries were as follows:

- In Liberia, efforts are focused on reassuring the population through the maintenance of strong defences and surveillance systems that promote societal resilience.
- In Sierra Leone, the National Ebola Response Centre recently convened a meeting for the international responders and NGOs to discuss ways to work together on the implementation of Operation Northern Push. Resources to support this Operation have been made available by development partners (including the World Bank).
- In Guinea, an international responder team had been taken hostage and was subsequently released. This incident highlighted the ongoing need for social mobilization and communication. Work is ongoing to improve the water, sanitation and hygiene facilities available to communities.
- Participants welcomed the work to strengthen preparedness in Guinea-Bissau and underscored the importance of ensuring that sufficient resources are available for priority actions.

Resource requirements

9. The management of disease outbreaks requires the maintenance of full capacity right up to their end – and beyond. With regard to this outbreak it can be anticipated with certainty that funds will be required to the end of October, but it is also very likely that funds will be required to the end of the year and thereafter. Based on resources currently available the UN system, IOM and IFRC expect to face monthly funding gaps of more than USD 30 million over the next few months.

10. The Ebola affected countries are also facing a systems crisis and financing will be needed not only for the response, but also for the mending of broken health systems.

11. The Islamic Development Bank noted that it is currently supporting activities related to both the response and building systems resilience, and looked forward to receiving more information about resource requirements.

Any other business

12. One participant noted an increase in cases of malaria even though the affected individuals had been taking prophylactics. Further information on whether other responders experienced this same phenomenon was sought.

13. Planning for the Secretary-General's International Ebola Recovery Conference is well underway. An update on the status of the national and regional recovery plans will be provided next week. The Secretary-General's Conference will complement the conference to be convened by the African Union on 20-21 July in Equatorial Guinea, entitled "International Conference on Africa's Fight Against Ebola". The AU Conference will highlight the theme of "Africa helping Africans" and discuss a proposal for an African Center for Disease Control.

Summary

14. In summary, the following issues were highlighted:

- There is scope for cautious optimism and recognition that the outbreak can be stopped with continued work on careful case investigation, narrowing the geographic scope of the transmission and building trust between responders and communities.
- Response approaches cannot be punitive, as people diagnosed with Ebola have not done anything wrong. Any involvement of the military should be understood as limited to facilitating the implementation of the civilian-led response effort.
- Quarantines should be seen as the process through which people receive support and encouragement during the 21-day incubation period. Individuals and households should be provided with appropriate incentives to stay in place.
- It is necessary to have political dialogue to make sure that the response is not politicized.
- Communities that are not currently experiencing Ebola transmissions require support and strong surveillance systems.
- Work on water and sanitation is important to develop trust, to promote health and to reduce the risk of all diseases.
- Responder fatigue is serious and the hard work of responders needs to be acknowledged and addressed.
