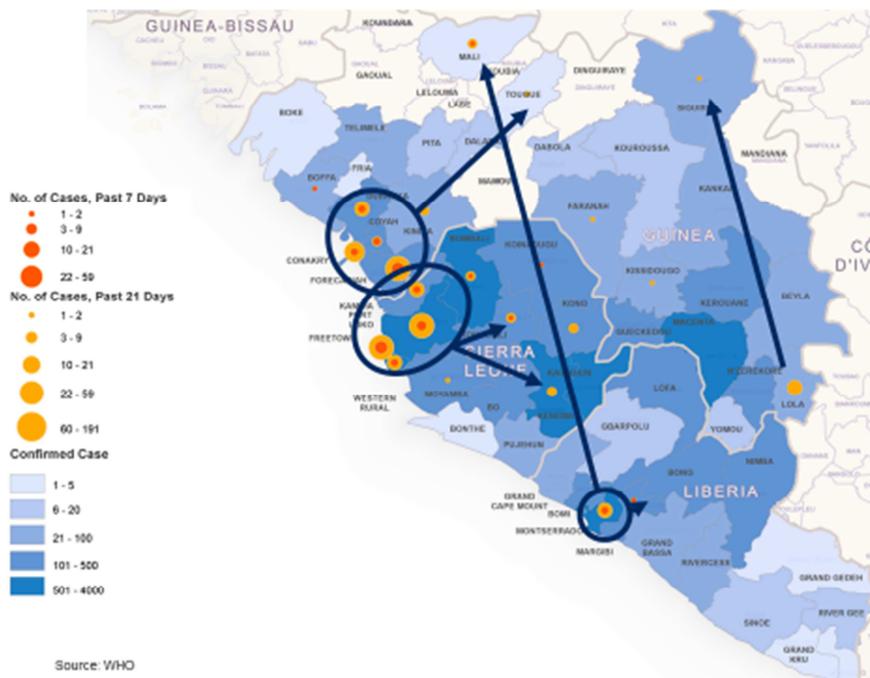


## Global Ebola Response Coalition Meeting 27<sup>th</sup> February 2015 Issues Discussed and Next Steps

The twentieth meeting of the Global Ebola Response Coalition Core Group took place on 27 February. The main points covered in the meeting follow.

2. Participants discussed the **status of the outbreak**. The cumulative number of people with Ebola is now at 23,781. The number of people newly diagnosed with Ebola in the 7 days to 22 February 2015, is 99; it was 131 in the preceding 7 days. This week's total reflects decreases in all 3 countries: Liberia 5 to 1, Guinea 52 to 35, Sierra Leone 74 to 63. In the last week, people have been diagnosed with Ebola within 23 of the 63 districts, counties and prefectures.

3. The interpretation is that there is a continued persistence of the outbreak with incidence rates of people newly diagnosed with Ebola at between 100 and 150 per week. The outbreak remains widely dispersed, with the greatest concentration in coastal areas especially where Guinea and Sierra Leone join geographically.



In Liberia there are 2 people thought to have Ebola in Montserrado County; they have come from the same transmission chain and from known contact lists. In Guinea, 94% of cases in the last week were in the Ba Guinea (coastal) area. Although there has been an encouraging reduction in new cases the Forest region, two new cases have been identified in Macenta. In Sierra Leone the outbreak in the Aberdeen area of Freetown has led to a flare-up in Tonkolili: all the new cases were from contact lists.

4. Participants discussed the **status of the response**. There is a continuing need to improve *intelligence* so that chains of transmission can be understood and appreciated. The understanding must be from the perspective of people and their communities, as well as from an epidemiological viewpoint. The building of *trust between people and responders* is extremely important, in order to optimize both case finding and contact tracing and to help ensure that there is no stigma attached to being a contact. People need to be able to *access the services needed to sustain livelihoods* (including health, schooling, markets and social protection): lack of these services contributes to mistrust between communities and responders. At this stage in the outbreak - with the emphasis on getting quickly to zero – there is a *vital need for coordination of all actors* for: (a) adjustable responses to the outbreak and (b) actions to ensure all people have safe access to essential services. The coordination *needs to be effective – and deep – within each district*. Stronger supervision of district level activities is necessary to ensure the quality of the interventions.

5. The following additional points were raised. Outbreaks of malaria and measles continue to be a concern: Governments are planning vaccination campaigns with the support of some responder organizations. Integration of community engagement efforts with the public health approach is vital, particularly as there is not uniformity in the ways in which community reticence is manifesting itself. Local-level approaches to community engagement are seen as vital for strengthening the response: “top-down” generally does not work.

6. Planning for the **3 March Conference in Brussels** is in the final stages. Indications are that the Presidents of the three most affected countries place a high value on the Conference. The President of Guinea has expressed his priority to work with partners to end the outbreak, and ensure that necessary surveillance is in place once we have reached zero; with recovery of essential services and longer term recovery to follow. The transitions from response to recovery may not be at the same pace in all countries. A differentiation between the early recovery and some aspects of the longer term recovery is necessary and useful. The most affected countries are interested in greater transparency of the investments made and how activities are coordinated, particularly at local level. Also they want to ensure there is strong alignment between their own national priorities and those of the international community on their behalf.

7. The Conference agenda has evolved to reflect a greater priority on the response, and this will now be the focus of the entire morning session. This reflects a strong consensus that the effort to get to zero remains the primary one. But the Conference will also consider the recovery of essential services and the issues around launching the process of longer term development. At present there are 120 delegations expected to attend the Conference, and 736 participants. The President of Liberia will speak on behalf of the three most affected countries during the opening session. The Outcome Statement from the event continues to be negotiated. There will be significant media representation in the Conference.

8. **In summary**, the following issues were highlighted: i) on the epidemiology, we continue to have a general plateauing of the numbers of new cases, at between 100 and 150 a week; ii) the focus of the new cases continues to be the coastal area of Guinea and the coastal and western area of Sierra Leone; iii) the response still needs to be intensified, which is slightly complicated by the reticence in some communities; iv) enormous progress has been made in this regard and the importance of continuing to work with the communities and their political, religious and other leaders and to build trust, is key; v) focus on getting to zero remains paramount but it is important also to pursue the safe revival of basic services; vi) significant and focused social and economic investment will be necessary once zero has been achieved, as will investment in the institutions of peace and security; vii) the Brussels Conference is an important opportunity to come together to address the challenges collectively, and to highlight the continued importance to mobilise resources if we are to sustain the effort to zero; and viii) a future meeting of the GERC would look at the issue of information management and also have a session to look at the various lessons learned processes which are in train. On the former, any views from participants about the importance of this issue and on the necessary content of any such discussion, should please be shared with John Gordon.

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