

Global Ebola Response Coalition
3 July 2015
Issues Discussed and Next Steps

The thirty-fifth meeting of the Global Ebola Response Coalition Core Group took place on 3 July. The main points covered in the meeting follow.

Status of the outbreak

1. Participants discussed the status of the outbreak. The number of people newly diagnosed with Ebola in the week ending on 28 June is 20, with 12 in Guinea and 8 in Sierra Leone. The total number of people diagnosed with Ebola is 27,505, with 11,220 deaths.
2. In Guinea, there has been real progress. There have been flares in Boké and Forécariah (Benty), but the overall geographic scope and number of transmission chains is decreasing. All people diagnosed with Ebola can be traced back to known transmission chains. There continues to be movement of contacts, resulting in new flares in Conakry.
3. In Sierra Leone, there appear to be four transmission chains. In Port Loko and Kambia, there is a strong understanding of the transmission chains and rapid responses as people newly diagnosed with Ebola are reported. The conditions are more challenging in Western Area Urban.
4. During the current week beginning on 29 June, there have been three cases reported in Liberia thus far. A 17-year old boy died on 28 June, and two other young men who were friends with him have also died. All three are from Margibi, in a town close to the airport. Over 239 contacts are now being monitored, and high-risk contacts have been subject to a preventive quarantine. A number of hypotheses for the transmission are being examined, including the possibility that the transmission was related to an Ebola survivor.

Status of the response

5. Participants discussed the status of the response. Participation noted that the intensification of activities in Guinea and Sierra Leone has generally improved the conditions of quarantines.
6. In Sierra Leone, Operation Northern Push is in its second week. Participants observed improved care for households under quarantine and improved access to water and food. Increased efforts to find missing contacts have been successful. It was observed that the implementation and enforcement of by-laws on reporting and movement has created fear and discouraged communities from cooperating. Amnesties have led to some people coming forward with information. Another aspect of reducing fear is to continue to promote public awareness of the work of the Ebola treatment

centres and response activities. Secret burials and unsafe washing of dead bodies is continuing in some places.

7. FOCUS 1000, an NGO based in Sierra Leone, reported on its engagement with traditional healers in Sierra Leone. Work is being done to map traditional healers in Port Loko and Kmabia, through union registration and other networks. Senior traditional healers will be coordinating efforts with paramount chiefs to undertake chiefdom-specific interventions and promote a temporary cessation of traditional healing practices in secret shrines until the Ebola outbreak has ended.

8. In Guinea-Bissau, a high-level multi-sectoral mission is currently in country. This mission has visited a mobile laboratory managed by a Portuguese, and met with the Minister of Health and the UN Resident Coordinator. The work of the team in Guinea-Bissau will be focused on intensifying activities related to surveillance, community engagement and social mobilization, case definition, early detection, case management, and rapid response. A simulation exercise will be conducted, involving sample testing, case management and contact tracing. The team is working to strengthen and streamline mechanisms for coordination, operation management and situation monitoring and reporting. The team is also working on creating a surge capacity in the event of Ebola transmissions in Guinea-Bissau. The team will be meeting with the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister to explain the need for a paradigm shift, in order to be ready to undertake response activities.

9. IFRC reported that it is finalising a new anthropological study in Guinea-Bissau and will adapt its safe and signified burial approaches accordingly. In Liberia, IFRC is mobilising teams to respond to new flareups and cautioned that if the new reports of Ebola transmission are confirmed to be linked to survivors, then more attention to the issue of stigmatisation of survivors will be important.

10. Oxfam spoke about its work on Ebola preparedness and prevention in Senegal, Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, focusing on community awareness, water, sanitation and health. With regard to Guinea Bissau, Oxfam welcomed the focus of the multi-sector mission on strengthening coordination and leadership at the central level. In the areas bordering Boké, there was concern that health centres lacked basic infrastructure (including water, electricity and transport) and Ebola training. It was stressed that investments in building up local capacity was needed. In Tombali, on the border with Guinea, there are currently only 75 people working on community sensitization and engagement for a population of 18,000. While the government is focused on surveillance at entry points, there should also be a focus on community engagement.

Update on the Secretary-General's International Ebola Recovery Conference

11. The website for Secretary-General's International Ebola Recovery Conference has been established and contains links to the following documents:

- The programmes for the 9 July technical consultations and 10 July conference
- Concept notes for the technical discussions on 9 July

- A note providing guidance on logistical matters for Government participants. (A separate note for NGO and private sector participants were shortly be made available.)

12. Confirmations have been received from the Presidents of the three affected countries, and high-level representatives from partner organisations and donor countries. There will be strong participation from the African Union, the World Bank, the European Union, and the African Development Bank.

Summary

13. In summary, the following issues were highlighted:

- The new instances of Ebola infection in Margibi, Liberia demonstrate the importance of continuous vigilance. There has been a strong, well-coordinated response in Margibi to identify and follow contacts, and a high-quality quarantine of contacts who pose risks.
- In the Kaffu Bullom chiefdom in Port Loko, Sierra Leone, there has been real progress in improving the quality of quarantines which, in turn, creates incentives for contacts to stay in their homes. The quality of contact tracing and analysis of transmission chains is improving.
- The imposition of penalties for infringing by-laws on reporting and movement creates disincentives for compliance with response measures and contribute to distrust between communities and responders. There are still many people who do not understand the dangers associated with body-washing and unsafe burials. In order to promote that understanding, there has to be open discourse.
- In Guinea-Bissau, simulation exercises are underway and platforms for coordination are being established. Responders are working to increase community engagement and logistics preparedness. Engagement with political leaders is key to promoting an understanding of the importance of preparedness. There is a need for increased community engagement.
- In Sierra Leone, there is engagement with registered and unregistered traditional healers to involve them in the response, together with paramount chiefs and secret societies.
- There is a need to recognise that the systems in the Ebola affected countries are in crisis, are damaged and are not working. The purpose of the 10 July International Ebola Recovery Conference is to address this situation, to rebuild systems and the trust of communities, and to ensure that there is a real promise of long-term support to the Ebola affected countries.
- In South Korea and other countries currently dealing with the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), there is heightened interest in how the Ebola epidemic was handled.
