

COMMUNIQUÉ

Introduction

Following the emergence of Ebola virus disease (EVD) in West Africa and the threat it poses to regional and global public health, the World Health Organisation (WHO) convened a two-day emergency meeting of ministers of health of selected countries and partners, in Accra, Ghana, from 2-3 July 2014.

The main goal of the meeting was to bring together ministers of health and key stakeholders to build a consensus on appropriate action(s) to interrupt the on-going Ebola virus transmission in West Africa.

The meeting provided an opportunity to give an update and share experience on the Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak in the subregion; discuss key issues regarding the containment of the EVD outbreak in West Africa; and agree on a strategy for accelerated operational response.

The meeting was attended by ministers of health and senior staff from Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

Partners involved in the response to the current outbreak including UN Agencies, CDC, DFID, EU, ECHO, Institute Pasteur, IFRC, MSF, PHE, USAID, and WAHO participated in the meeting and expressed their appreciation of the opportunity for dialogue and consensus building. They also expressed their views on the key issues raised by the governments of the participating countries.

The WHO Secretariat was composed of the WHO Regional Director for Africa, the WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Security, technical staff from the WHO headquarters, Regional Office for Africa, Inter-country Support Team for West Africa (IST/WA) and WHO Country Representatives of the participating countries.

The meeting participants reviewed the current epidemiological situation and considered that the magnitude of the current Ebola epidemic is unprecedented, with an estimated more than 750 cases and nearly 500 deaths in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. They expressed concern about the adverse socioeconomic impact.

The participants noted and appreciated the current efforts by governments of West African countries, partners and WHO to stop the epidemic. Nevertheless they identified critical challenges to be addressed in the areas of coordination, communication, cross border collaboration, logistics, financing, case management, infection control, surveillance and contact tracing, community participation and research. The ministers of health agreed that the current situation poses a serious threat to all countries in the subregion and beyond and therefore called for immediate action.

The ministers adopted a common intercountry strategy calling for accelerated response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. The strategy stresses the need for regional, subregional and national leadership, coordinated actions by all stakeholders, enhanced cross border collaboration and involvement of communities.

The meeting also reaffirmed the need for high-level national leadership by Heads of State and Government in order to facilitate intersectoral interventions and coordination required to cope with the epidemic. The role of the African Union and ECOWAS was considered essential to provide political and diplomatic support. To that end, it was strongly recommended that ECOWAS Heads of State address the issue of the current EVD outbreak at their forthcoming summit meeting scheduled for 10 to 11 July in Accra, Ghana.

After two days of assessment and discussion on critical issues related to the Ebola outbreak, the participants made the following recommendations to:

1. Governments:

- (a) Mobilize relevant government sectors and community, religious and political leaders to work together to increase awareness of, psychosocial support for, and understanding of the Ebola situation by communities in order to carry out a more effective response.
- (b) Convene national intersectoral meetings involving key government ministries, national technical coordinating committee members and stakeholders to develop a roadmap for immediate implementation of the strategy adopted at the meeting.
- (c) Deploy additional national staff with the necessary qualifications and resources to strengthen response activities in the hotspots.
- (d) Identify and commit additional domestic financial resources to support the outbreak response.
- (e) Work together and share experiences with other countries that have previously managed Ebola outbreaks in a spirit of South-South collaboration.
- (f) Organize cross border consultations to facilitate exchange of information and agree on joint collaborative actions.
- (g) Strengthen surveillance, case finding, reporting and contact tracing and share information on EVD with WHO in a timely manner.
- (h) Continue to build and strengthen IHR core capacities especially those needed to respond to serious public health events.
- (i) Pay their contributions to the African Public Health Emergency Fund (APHEF) to support response to outbreaks and other public health emergencies.
- (j) Improve community information and communication in matters related to the Ebola epidemic, respecting the different cultural contexts, enhance awareness and promote community participation in preventive, curative and health promotion interventions.

2. Partners:

- (a) Continue to participate in the response activities in line with the identified country priorities.
- (b) Provide technical and financial support for response operations in the EVD-affected countries and for preparedness in countries at risk of EVD.
- (c) Adopt a coordinated approach to resource mobilization and allocation.
- (d) Continue to work with WHO in a coordinated manner to ensure a more effective response.

3. World Health Organization:

- (a) Provide leadership in the coordination of international partners at global, regional and country levels in providing support for national plans.
- (b) Urgently establish a subregional control centre located in Guinea to act as a coordinating platform for consolidation and harmonization of the technical support provided to West African countries by all major partners, and assist in resource mobilization.
- (c) Mobilize and deploy the required WHO staff and other experts, consultants, institutions and networks especially through GOARN to support the response to the ongoing EVD outbreak.
- (d) Regularly disseminate up-to-date risk assessment and other information on the EVD outbreak to stakeholders.
- (e) Develop and disseminate information, education and communication materials for public awareness and training materials for health professionals, on Ebola virus disease prevention and control.
- (f) Facilitate cross border collaboration among countries.
- (g) Continue to provide the necessary support to strengthen the core capacities crucial to responding to serious public health events.
- (h) Work closely with countries and provide leadership in the international effort to identify and prioritize key gaps and promote the research needed to address Ebola virus disease and other haemorrhagic fevers.

Concluding the meeting, the ministers expressed satisfaction with its outcomes and requested the Minister of Health of Ghana to thank His Excellency the President of Ghana, Dr John Mahama, for facilitating the hosting of this important meeting. The ministers further requested the President of Ghana, currently Chairman of ECOWAS, to emphasize the seriousness of the current outbreak during the upcoming ECOWAS Heads of State summit. The ministers went on to reiterate their call for action by all countries within and outside the subregion in the provision of support to the affected countries and communities in order to urgently stop the outbreak of Ebola virus disease.

Issued by the meeting of ministers of health in Accra, Ghana, on 3 July 2014.