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EBOLA OUTBREAK CONTINUES TO RAVAGE SIERRA LEONE

The Sierra Leone Government applied new measures to curb the spread of Ebola Virus disease (EVD) as Western Area of the country is the hotspot at the moment, with highest transmission of the three most affected countries.

Government of Sierra Leone applied new measures to curb spread of EVD

On the 16th of December on Sierra Leone National television, President Ernest Bai Koroma declared “Operation Western Area Surge” in a national broadcast as the EVD incidence continues to rise in the Western Area and some districts. This area accounts for 50% of the new rise of EVD cases, reported BBC.

From the 17th of December the Government authorities commenced a house-to-house search for hidden Ebola cases in the capital and surrounding areas in an effort to stem the EVD's rampant spread. Already in September 2014, there was a lockdown on the entire nation to identify EVD sufferers. With the disease now spreading fastest in Sierra Leone as compared to Liberia and Guinea as reported by WHO, authorities are ramping up their response.

In many districts in Sierra Leone there are signs that the increase in incidence has slowed down according to WHO report but in Western Areas and some districts the incidence continues to rise. Freetown and its surrounds have shown more increased incidence as compared to other districts in the country.

Therefore, the Sierra Leone Government introduced new stringent measures to control the situation. The Government has earlier launched series of quarantines in many hot spot areas or districts, and even quarantined the entire country (“lockdown” in September) in order to help reduce the spread of the Ebola virus.

According to Government Plan published in mid-December, Health workers will go from



FIGURE 1. HEALTH WORKERS HAVE BEGUN HOUSE-TO-HOUSE SEARCHES IN FREETOWN. SOURCE: BBC

house-to-house to seek Ebola sufferers and anyone with whom they have contacted.

Anyone found suffering from EVD will be taken to be treated in the new British Ebola Treatment Centre in Kerry Town, Freetown.



Impact on Christmas and New Year festivities

The new stringent measures will also affect Christmas and New Year festivities. Christians are allowed to attend church services but must return home immediately, and all Christmas festivities are banned. All New Year's Eve church services should stop at 5pm local time and people should go home, while on New Year's Day all festivities are banned too. All these new measures are enacted for reducing physical contact among people in the public in order to slow the transmission of EVD. (Continue next page)

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Impact on Christmas and New Year Festivities

This is not easy time for Sierra Leoneans, as the whole nation should be celebrating Christmas and New Year together regardless of their religion. As President Bai Ernest Koroma said: *"I know that this is the festive season where Sierra Leoneans often celebrate with families in a flamboyant and joyous manner, but all must be reminded that our country is at war with a vicious enemy"*.

Also a travel ban between districts was enforced, a ban on Sunday trading, and short Saturday shopping (shops are closing by noon). These measures will also have an impact on commerce in general affecting livelihoods of Sierra Leoneans in the country. The government will lose revenue as many holiday makers and tourists will not visit Sierra Leone because of the EVD outbreak.

The Ebola Virus has killed more than 7,588 persons, based on the WHO 24 December 2014 Situation report. In Sierra Leone

alone the death toll (probable, confirmed and suspected) is 2,582. In Guinea it is 1,607 and in Liberia 3,384. These three countries have been most affected countries. See figures 2, 3 and 4.

Sierra Leone has had more Ebola cases than any other country, reported BBC on the 17th of December. President Ernest Bai Koroma also confirmed this in his address to the nation in which he said Sierra Leone has overtaken Liberia as the country now having the highest cases of Ebola. The WHO's recent report also confirmed this.

The Sierra Leone Health and Sanitation Authority had earlier recorded over 8,000 cases out of 19,000 cases in the three worst affected countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone). The figures from WHO portray there is an urgent need for foreign medical personnel to come and assist in Sierra Leone.

Current Situation for EVD Infrastructure is Appalling

Although Western governments have built some Ebola Clinics and Treatment Centers, these are still under-staffed. More clinics are also needed in other areas of the country since the distances are long and the roads are often in poor condition. In some cases patients die on their way to EVD clinic.

Moreover, there are not enough ambulances to transport EVD sufferers and laboratory facilities are not sufficiently available. There are only about six laboratories functioning in Sierra Leone and suspected EVD patients have to wait for the results; sometimes they even die before the tests confirm the disease.

Ebola survival chances depend on early treatment, often when patients are treated too late the EVD has done massive internal organ damage. Fully functional laboratories with resources are needed all around the country to facilitate detection of EVD, and faster treatment to sufferers can enhance survival rate. More laboratories including technicians and virologists or microbiologist are needed from abroad to help in the country to curb out the EVD disease.

In addition, the situation in the country for medical personnel is a huge problem. More medical personnel from outside the country are still needed to stop the outbreak. The current international medical personnel resources are not enough to curb the EDV at this pace of transmission.

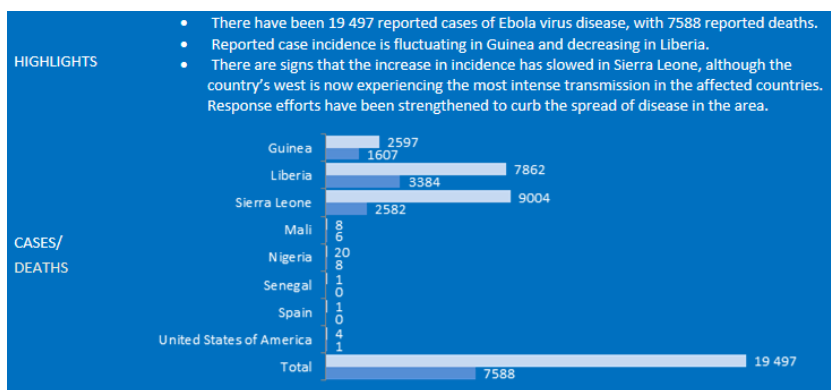


FIGURE 3 WHO EBOLA RESPONSE ROADMAP SITUATION REPORT GRAPH ON CASES/DEATH (SOURCE: WHO)

Country	Case definition	Cumulative cases	Cases in past 21 days	Cumulative deaths
Guinea	Confirmed	2284	328	1344
	Probable	263	*	263
	Suspected	50	*	0
	Total	2597	328	1607
Liberia ⁵	Confirmed	3085	121	±
	Probable	1757	*	±
	Suspected	3020	*	±
	Total	7862	121	3384
Sierra Leone	Confirmed	7017	1039	2216
	Probable	287	*	208
	Suspected	1700	*	158
	Total	9004	1039	2582
Total		19 463	1488	7573

FIGURE 2. CONFIRMED, PROBABLE, AND SUSPECTED CASES IN GUINEA, LIBERIA, AND SIERRA LEONE (SOURCE: WHO)

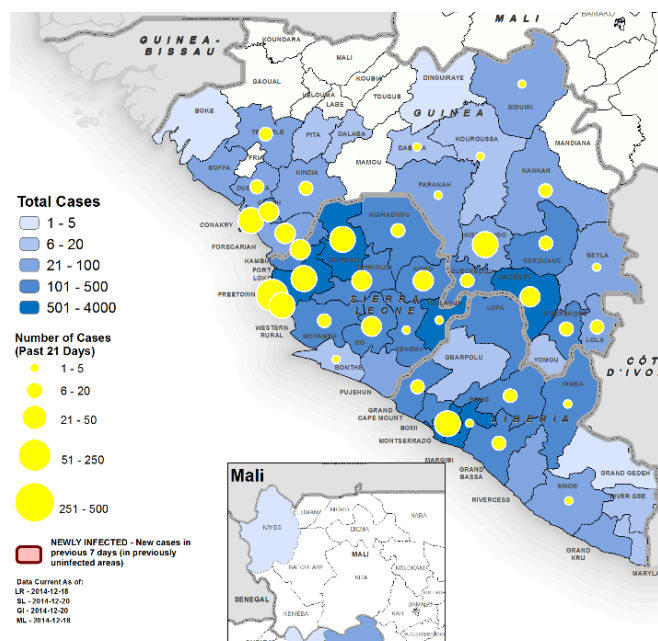


Figure 4. Geographical distribution of new and total confirmed and probable* cases in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Mali.



Poor Healthcare Infrastructure and Other Challenges Facing Sierra Leone

Ebola used to be an unknown disease in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. In these EVD outbreak countries, people in general have no experience about EVD. The National Health Authorities did not have experience or know-how to deal with such disease.

Sensitization of the public became challenging, and local customs and burial practices amplified the spread of the EVD. The denial syndrome - that Ebola does not exist - continues despite the series of appeals Government and partners have made.

Sierra Leone endured over 11 years of civil war which ended in 2001. The physical infrastructure and public health resources were devastated during the war. Although there was some improvement going on in the health sector it was not enough as the government has to address other physical infrastructure issues such as building roads , energy sector etc.

The Health infrastructure still needs massive investment. Unfortunately, EVD outbreak did not show any mercy but ravaged the country backwards in terms of the positive economic growth it had already made. The amount of medical doctors per population is one of the lowest in the world.

The world needs to do more; not just focus action on how to prevent the sickness from coming over to their country but to send more health personnel to fight the EVD in its source.

Major airlines stopped flying to Sierra Leone making matters worse for volunteers who want to come to Sierra Leone to work. Also equipment and medication needed for treating patients will be delayed due to lack of flights.

The country is in desperate need of outside aid to stop the virus, and the entire world needs to see the epidemic brought to a complete halt.

An Appeal for more Medical Personnel in Sierra Leone

Health authorities in Sierra Leone are struggling to contain the worst outbreak of the deadly epidemic which has killed over 2000 people since May this year, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). The highest number of deaths in recent weeks has been recorded in the Western Area and its surroundings, the WHO said. For example, 315 new confirmed cases were reported in the week before 21 December. EVD transmission in the country is currently intense in Western area and the Northern districts.

The statistics look worrying. The country urgently needs foreign medical personnel to come and assist. According to report on Sky News, a newly built hospital (built about 2 Months ago) by the British Army in Moyamba is ready with 100 beds. However, the clinic only has two doctors.

On the 30th of November BBC reported that only 44 out of the 80 beds in Kerry Town Treatment Center have been used. Some Sierra Leoneans and humanitarian experts expressed that the Kerry Town Treatment centre is behind schedule and lacking a sense of urgency. The problem with these newly built clinics is that they lack enough medical personnel run them. Moreover, it takes long time to train medical personnel who had no experience about EVD to be ready.

Health Workers are at Risk

The Glasgow nurse who returned from Sierra Leone on Sunday has been confirmed positive with

EVD. This shows how foreign health workers too are at risk especially when clinics are short of resources needed to run them. A nation like Sierra Leone cannot cope, it will need more medical personnel.

Ebola will become a global problem if countries with expertise do not contribute more resources in tackling the outbreak. For example, the virus can remain undetected for a long time. The UK nurse who contacted EVD passed through three airports undetected. Since the nurse understood what to do after developing fever; the health authority was informed and the appropriate measures were taken.

This can also happen to non-health worker personnel coming from EVD outbreak countries who may not be aware what to do when they start to feel unwell. Therefore they can even spread the EVD among family members, friends and to the public.

Countries Imposing Mandatory Quarantine

There has been controversy concerning mandatory quarantines for healthcare workers who worked with Ebola patients in or from the outbreak countries. On the one hand many critics have said mandatory quarantines could deter doctors and nurses from countries which such measures not to come forward to help. This will make the situation worse as those few health workers already in the Ebola countries are exhausted as the EVD transmission intensifies.

There is a huge need for volunteers

from Western Countries and countries who have expertise to contribute such resources. The amount of doctors in the outbreak countries is very low, especially in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Doctors per Population in the Outbreak Countries

According to World Bank, the number of people per doctor in Sierra Leone is 45,000. Liberia has 70,000 persons per doctor. Guinea which was not rampaged by war has 10,000 persons per doctor. Compared to developed countries, for example, the US has one doctor per 410 people, and Germany has 260 persons per doctor.

These figures in the three outbreak countries suggest that there is no way each of these countries will fight the outbreak without additional medical staff from other countries. The amount of foreign Medical Staff in Sierra Leone is still not enough. The country will need more medical personnel to come to the country. Moreover, the country has lost around 8 doctors and many health workers who have succumbed to EVD.

Warning

The Head of US Center for Disease Control and Prevention Tom Frieden told the AP news agency that "*the fight is going to be long and hard to get to zero cases*".

SIERRA LEONE NEEDS MORE MEDICAL PERSONNEL!

"Please, we need your help to fight the EVD"