Beat: Health

Africa faces unprecedented; Ebola outbreak as virus spread to L

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USPA News - Two cases of the deadly Ebola virus have been confirmed in the African nation of Liberia, officials said on Monday, as doctors described as "unprecedented" the ongoing outbreak in neighboring Guinea that has so far claimed the lives of nearly 80 people. Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders, MSF) said health officials in West Africa faced an "unprecedented epidemic" with the continuous spread of the Ebola virus, which is now present in various parts of Guinea.

Health authorities there have reported at least 122 suspected cases and 78 deaths from the outbreak. The outbreak features the Zaire strain of the virus, which is considered the most aggressive and deadly, killing more than 9 out of 10 affected on average. Authorities have grown increasingly concerned with the disease reaching the Guinean capital of Conakry and, as of Monday, neighboring Liberia. "We are facing an epidemic of a magnitude never before seen in terms of the distribution of cases in the country," said Mariano Lugli, coordinator of MSF`s project in Conakry. Cases have been reported in the Guinean regions of Guekedou, Macenta, Kissidougou, and Nzerekore, in addition to confirmed cases in Liberia and suspected cases in Sierra Leone. The World Health Organization said Liberia reported two laboratory-confirmed cases of Ebola in persons who had traveled to Guinea, with at least one additional victim also believed to have been suffering from the virus. Sierra Leone has also identified two suspected cases, both of whom died and had traveled to Guinea. MSF said that there will be approximately 60 experienced international field workers - doctors, nurses, epidemiologists, water and sanitation experts - divided between Conakry and the southeast of Guinea to assist local authorities. In addition, more than 40 tons of equipment has been flown into the country to help stop the rapid spread of the virus. In collaboration with the Guinean health authorities and the World Health Organization (WHO), MSF was able to isolate affected patients at the referral hospital of Donka. MSF has also begun identifying people who may have already been in contact with existing patients in an effort to prevent further spread. MSF deployed teams in Guekedou and Macenta over the last two weeks in addition to establishing two structures for patient isolation to help control the spread. "To stop the outbreak, it is important to trace the chain of transmission," said Michael Van Herp, an MSF epidemiologist stationed in Guekedou. Ebola is a highly infectious disease and kills its victims in a very short time, though the virus can easily be confused with many other diseases. The signs and symptoms include high grade fever, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, headache, measles-like rash, red eyes, and in some cases bleeding from body openings. The virus, for which there is no cure or vaccine, can spread through direct contact with body fluids such as saliva, blood, stool, vomit, urine, and sweat but also through soiled linen used by an infected person. It can also spread by using skin piercing instruments previously used by an infected person or by touching the dead body of a person who died of Ebola.

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