

5 things to know about Ebola outbreak in W. Africa

28 July 2014, by The Associated Press



In this photo taken on Sunday, July 27, 2014, a boy, center, selling soft drinks walk past a clinic taking care of Ebola patients in the Kenema District on the outskirts of Kenema, Sierra Leone. Liberia President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has closed some border crossings and ordered strict quarantines of communities affected by the Ebola outbreak. The announcement late Sunday came a day after Sirleaf formed a new taskforce charged with containing the disease, which has killed 129 people in the country and more than 670 across the region. (AP Photo/ Youssouf Bah)

(AP)—There has been panic and fear about the deadly Ebola disease spreading ever since Nigerian health officials reported Friday that a Liberian man sick with the disease had traveled to Togo and then Nigeria before dying. Here are five things to know about Ebola and how it is spread:

1. THE WEST AFRICA EBOLA OUTBREAK IS NOW THE LARGEST IN HISTORY. The World Health Organization says more than 672 people have died from Ebola. A total of 1,201 cases had been reported as of last week in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In addition, one Liberian man has died in Nigeria.

2. BUT SOME PEOPLE HAVE SURVIVED

EBOLA. While the fatality rate for Ebola can be as high as 90 percent, health officials in the three countries say people have recovered from the virus and the current death rate is about 70 percent. Those who fared best sought immediate medical attention and got supportive care to prevent dehydration even though there is no specific treatment for Ebola itself.

3. EBOLA CAN LOOK A LOT LIKE OTHER DISEASES. The early symptoms of an Ebola infection include fever, headache, muscle aches and sore throat, according to the World Health Organization. It can be difficult to distinguish between Ebola and the symptoms of malaria, typhoid fever or cholera. Only in later stages do people with Ebola begin bleeding both internally and externally, often through the nose and ears.

4. EBOLA IS ONLY SPREAD THROUGH BODILY FLUIDS. The Ebola virus is not airborne, so people would have to come into contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person. These include blood, sweat, vomit, feces, urine, saliva or semen—making transmission through casual contact in a public setting unlikely.

5. FEAR AND MISINFORMATION THOUGH IS MAKING THINGS WORSE. In each of the affected countries, health workers and clinics have come under attack from panicked residents who mistakenly blame foreign doctors and nurses for bringing the virus to remote communities. Family members also have removed sick Ebola patients from hospitals, including one woman in Sierra Leone's capital who later died. Police had to use tear gas to disperse others who attacked a hospital in the country.

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APA citation: 5 things to know about Ebola outbreak in W. Africa (2014, July 28) retrieved 1 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-07-ebola-outbreak-africa.html>

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