

Beat: Health

MSF says Ebola outbreak in West Africa is out of control

-, 24.06.2014, 03:06 Time

USPA News - Doctors Without Borders (MSF) on Monday said the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, which has already claimed more than 350 lives across three affected countries, is "out of control" and warned that the organization no longer has the capacity to respond to new outbreaks. MSF, which is also known by its French name Médecins Sans Frontières, is the only international aid organization that is treating people affected by the deadly Ebola virus.

The organization is now calling for regional governments and aid agencies to prepare a "massive deployment of resources" to bring the outbreak under control. "The epidemic is out of control. With the appearance of new sites in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, there is a real risk of it spreading to other areas," said Dr. Bart Janssens, MSF director of operations. "We have reached our limits. Despite the human resources and equipment deployed by MSF in the three affected countries, we are no longer able to send teams to the new outbreak sites." The outbreak features the Zaire strain of the Ebola virus, which is considered the most aggressive and deadly strain, killing more than 9 out of 10 affected on average. Since the initial outbreak in Guinea in March, the virus has also spread to neighboring countries Liberia and Sierra Leone, making it the first international outbreak of the virus. "The WHO (World Health Organization), the affected countries, and neighboring countries, must deploy the resources necessary for an epidemic of this scale," said Janssen. "In particular, qualified medical staff need to be made available, training in how to treat Ebola needs to be organized, and awareness-raising activities among the population need to be stepped up." Since the outbreak began, authorities in the affected countries have reported a total of 567 cases, including 350 deaths, making it the worst ever outbreak of the virus. The vast majority of cases have been reported in Guinea, but Sierra Leone reported nearly 40 new cases in a span of just three days last week. "Ebola is no longer a public health issue limited to Guinea. It is affecting the whole of West Africa," Janssen said. MSF and its more than 300 staff members, with more than 40 tons of equipment and supplies, have treated more than 470 Ebola patients in specialized treatment centers since the outbreak began, but the organization is having difficulty responding to the large number of new cases emerging in different locations. MSF is supporting health authorities in Guinea by treating Ebola patients in Conakry, Téliimélé, and Guéckédou. The organization also built additional treatment units in Macenta, Kissidougou, and Dabola, while MSF teams are responding to suspected cases in villages and supporting epidemiological surveillance. In neighboring Sierra Leone, meanwhile, MSF is working with the Ministry of Health in constructing a 50-bed Ebola treatment center in Kailahun, which is expected to open later this week. Small transit care units have already been set up in Koidu and Daru, with a third opening soon in Buedu. 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. The first outbreak of Ebola in 1976 in Zaire - which is now the Democratic Republic of Congo - had been the deadliest until the current outbreak, killing at least 280 people and sickening 38 others, putting the fatality rate at 88 percent. The Ebola outbreak in Uganda in 2000 had long been the largest ever recorded, killing 224 people and sickening at least 201 others.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2354/msf-says-ebola-outbreak-in-west-africa-is-out-of-control.html>

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