

Amid meager international assistance, Ebola death toll in Africa surges past five thousand

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The worldwide death toll from the Ebola virus outbreak is now at least 5,177 people, according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) most recent November 14 status update.

Overall, the WHO reports that there have been 14,413 "confirmed, probable, and suspected" cases of Ebola since the outbreak in March. Many of those who currently have it are likely to perish from the virus, which has been killing up to 70 percent of those who contract it in Africa.

The infection rate continues to soar in Sierra Leone, where at least 421 people were infected in the first full week of November. The WHO reported that there was "some evidence" that the rate of infection was holding steady on a national level in Guinea and Liberia, the two other severely affected countries. However, a spokesperson for *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) warned *Newsweek* that while "we have seen a dip [in Liberia]... our concern now is that it might not be sustained."

Speaking to *Newsweek*, WHO spokesman Daniel Epstein said that, "transmission remains persistent and widespread, particularly in the capital cities."

Both the WHO and MSF spokespeople emphasized that the actual rate of infection was likely higher, due to widespread underreporting. The MSF told *Newsweek*, "We're concerned that people were maybe keeping sick relatives at home and burying their own dead due to poor perceptions of treatment centers."

The WHO reports that as of November 9, Liberia required over 2,500 Ebola treatment center beds, Sierra Leone over 1,000, and Guinea over 500. However, the actual number of beds available is a small fraction of the minimum amount needed. Liberia has just over 500 beds, Sierra Leone a little over 250 and Guinea less than that. *Time* magazine calculates that just 24 percent

of planned treatment center beds are operational, and "only 4 percent of the some 2,636 beds planned for community care centers have been set up." Without proper facilities to take care of those with the disease, the infected remain with family members at home, who then have a high chance of being infected themselves.

According to the MSF official who spoke to *Newsweek*, international support has been "slow and inadequate." The WHO reports that it has received only 49 percent of the \$260 million the organization needs to meet its basic objectives in fighting the outbreak.

The WHO has planned 53 Ebola treatment centers in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. However, only 19 of them are currently operational. In a statement Wednesday, WHO said that it estimates that it needs at least 370 teams trained in safe burial procedure, but there are only about 140 currently operating.

In October, WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan asked an audience, "Ebola emerged nearly 40 years ago... Why are clinicians still empty-handed, with no vaccines and no cure?" She answered by stating that, "Ebola has been, historically, geographically confined to poor African nations. The R&D incentive is virtually nonexistent. A profit-driven industry does not invest in products for markets that cannot pay."

Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea ranked among the poorest countries in the world last year, with respective annual per capita GDPs of \$878, \$1,927 and \$1,255—well below the global per capita GDP of \$14,293. These countries were each established as colonies by the major imperialist powers and remain to this day sites of highly exploitative resource extraction. Much of the world's diamonds, latex, and several other goods come from the region. (See on the WSWS: *Capitalism and the Ebola Crisis*)

Spain, which had its first internally spread Ebola case

in October, has not had any new infections for over three weeks. Though suffering from growing and deepening cuts to social programs, Spain had about 370 doctors for every 100,000 people in 2012. In contrast, Sierra Leone has roughly 2 doctors for every 100,000 people, and Liberia has closer to 1. Many of the dead are themselves doctors and health care workers who have taken care of Ebola patients—leaving the area further understaffed.

The *Economist* writes that Spain “spends over \$3,000 per person at purchasing-power parity on health care; for Sierra Leone, the figure is just under \$300.” According to the WHO, Liberia and Guinea spend even less than that, \$100 per person or less.

On October 8, the World Bank released estimates on the economic impact of the Ebola crisis in the three most affected countries. While the estimates have a large range, the current 2015 high estimate for Liberia is a loss of 12 percent of its GDP. The lowest estimate is about 6 percent. In Sierra Leone, the World Bank estimates that the loss will be between one and nine percent of its GDP.



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