

In the news

EBOLA VIRUS IN WEST AFRICA

In the ongoing outbreak of Ebola virus disease in the West African country Guinea, >120 suspected and confirmed cases have been reported, with a fatality rate of >60% (WHO, 1 April 2014). Ebola virus (EBOV; formerly known as Zaire ebolavirus) was first identified in the Democratic Republic of Congo (then known as Zaire) in 1976 and causes outbreaks of severe haemorrhagic fever. The virus is transmitted by direct contact with dead animals or infected individuals, and it is thought that the consumption of infected bats caused this outbreak in West Africa. There are currently no effective therapeutic or preventive treatment options.

Clinical samples tested positive for EBOV, which can have a mortality rate of ~90%. Continued efforts to contain the outbreak and prevent further spread are underway, including the establishment of isolation wards and mobile laboratories for more rapid detection of the virus, as well as investigations to identify the origins of the virus and its route of transmission. The consumption of bats has been banned in Guinea and the importance of hand washing is being emphasized. However, in addition to the first reported cases in the remote south-eastern region of Guinea, suspected and confirmed cases of haemorrhagic fever and deaths have also emerged in the capital Conakry in the west of the country as well as in the two neighbouring countries Sierra Leone and Liberia. In the hope of preventing the spread, the Health Minister of Senegal, Awa Marie Coll-Seck, said that “it’s safer to close our borders” (BBC News, 31 March 2014). Mariano Lugli, an official with Médecins Sans Frontières, cautioned that “we are facing an epidemic of a magnitude never before seen in terms of the distribution of cases”. However, Gregory Hartl, a WHO spokesman, said that it was neither an epidemic nor unprecedented. (BBC News, 1 April 2014).

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