UNICEF-Liberia
Ebola Virus Disease: SitRep #18
21 April 2014

Key Points

- The total number of suspected, probable and confirmed Ebola cases stands at 27; Ebola-related deaths stands at 13; and confirmed Ebola cases stands at six.
- The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) is in the midst of “cleaning” existing Ebola case data, including exclusion of cases that tested negative for the virus. The Ebola statistics are likely to change accordingly in the coming days.
- Foya, Lofa County, remains the epicentre of the Ebola epidemic. However, suspected, probable and confirmed Ebola cases have been reported in Lofa (10), Margibi (6), Bong (5), Nimba (4), Montserrado (1) and Grand Cape Mount (1) Counties.
- Over the weekend, the UNICEF-contracted interpersonal communication (IPC) team in Foya visited churches, met with community groups, attended the market day and interacted with local leaders about Ebola. The team reached some 3,000 parishioners in their church outreach alone. Similar outreach is being conducted by the UNICEF field coordinators in Voinjama and Foya, and by the IPC teams in Voinjama, Zorzor and Kolahun Districts.
- UNICEF’s estimated funding requirement for Ebola-related C4D, Health and WASH interventions stands at approximately US$500,000 for the period from 21 March to 21 June. Several donors have committed support to this budget. With this support, the current funding gap is US$270,000.

Situation Overview

- Since 18 April, no new suspected, probable or confirmed cases of Ebola have been reported. The total number of suspected, probable and confirmed Ebola cases thus stands at 27; Ebola-related deaths stands at 13; and confirmed Ebola cases stands at six.
- The MoHSW-led National Task Force (NTF) on Health Emergencies is in the midst of “cleaning” existing Ebola data, including removal of cases that tested negative for Ebola. This will result in changes in the Ebola statistics, including likely reductions in case numbers, deaths, etc.
- To date, suspected, probable and confirmed Ebola cases have been reported in Lofa (10), Margibi (6), Bong (5), Nimba (4), Montserrado (1) and Grand Cape Mount (1) Counties. However, the only confirmed cases have been reported in Lofa and Margibi Counties; and the only contacts linked to confirmed cases have been reported in Lofa, Margibi and Montserrado Counties. As such, MSF considers Lofa, Margibi and Montserrado as the counties of highest concern in terms of case management, surveillance, etc.
- The situation in Foya, Lofa County, is stable, though Ebola contacts continue to increase. This increase is not, however, linked to new cases. Rather, it is linked to improved contact tracing by general Community Health Volunteers (gCHVs) who were trained by a team from the US Center for Disease Control (CDC).
- The National Reference Lab (NRL)¹ in Margibi County has tested a second sample, which came back negative for Ebola.

UNICEF Response

Through its Communications and Child Survival Sections, UNICEF continues to provide critical communications for development (C4D); water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH); and health sector support to the national Ebola response. This work is performed in coordination with the relevant national committees and working groups: namely the Social Mobilization Committee of the NTF; the Case Management Committee of the NTF; and the WASH Working Group. Updates on specific UNICEF activities include the following:

¹ It will be recalled that the Ebola testing facility at the NRL is being supported by an interagency team from the United States comprised of the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the National Institute of Health (NIH) and the Department of Defense (DoD).
COMMUNICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT (C4D):
- UNICEF’s two field coordinators and the 10 person team contracted from the IPC firm are engaging intensively with communities to raise awareness of Ebola in Foya, Voinjama, Kolahun and Zorzor Districts, Lofa County.
  - The IPC team in Foya has met with the mayor as well as representatives from the city council, the Muslim and Christian communities, the Muslim Youth Association, the local motorcycle union and the Foya Intellectual Forum. Their outreach to the Christian community included visits to four churches, where they provided information on Ebola to around 3,000 worshippers attending Easter weekend services. The IPC team also attended market day in Foya on Saturday, where they used a megaphone to deliver Ebola awareness messages. The team is currently visiting communities between Solumba, which is near the Guinean border, and Foya.
  - The IPC teams in Zorzor, Kolahun and Voinjama are conducting similar outreach activities.
- UNICEF printed 10,000 copies each of its two new school and community-friendly posters on Ebola. These copies are in addition to the 400 posters printed last week, which were sent along with the field coordinators and IPC team to Lofa County. UNICEF will distribute the additional 20,000 posters to health facilities and outreach networks in Lofa, Bong, Nimba, Margibi and Monsterrado Counties.
- All UNICEF-supported mass media activities are ongoing, including work with local community radio stations and key national stations. At the national level, these efforts are supported by UNMIL, which continues to carry the 30-minute Ebola talk show from 12:10 to 12:40 PM, Monday through Friday. The show is rebroadcast on UNMIL Radio an additional two times per day. It is also being carried by the Liberia Broadcasting System.

CHILD SURVIVAL (WASH AND HEALTH):
- UNICEF provided additional supplies to support the isolation units at Foya Hospital in Lofa County and JFK Medical Center in Montserrado County. The former can now accept patients, while the latter is expected to be operational by Friday, 25 April.
- Meanwhile, UNICEF has finished gathering the remaining supplies requested last week by MSF for the isolation unit at Foya Hospital, Lofa County. These supplies include plastic chairs, tables, blankets, mattresses and water tanks, which will be dispatched by truck to Lofa County tomorrow.

UNICEF Funding Needs:
- UNICEF’s estimated funding requirement for Ebola-related C4D, Health and WASH interventions remains approximately US$500,000 for the period from 21 March to 21 June. To date the office has received the following support toward this budget: US$100,000 from the Japan National Committee for UNICEF; US$100,000 from the US Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance/OFDA (provided through UNICEF Regional Office for West and Central Africa); and US$30,000 from the UK Department for International Development/DFID (re-programmed funding). The current funding gap is thus US$270,000.

National Task Force Updates

BUDGET AND DONOR SUPPORT:
- The MoHSW’s three-month Ebola response budget still stands at US$2.5 million. It covers all 15 counties in Liberia but prioritizes Lofa, Bong, Nimba, Margibi, Montserrado and Grand Cape Mount. The MoHSW may scale up efforts in Gbarpolu County, which borders Lofa, if needed.
- As previously reported, the Ministry of Finance has appropriated US$250,000 for the budget, and the Mano River Union (MRU) has provided US$10,000. These funds are currently earmarked to support coordination of the response, which is being led by the MoHSW.
- Many other partners and donors have provided support to the response plan and budget, though this support has primarily been in-kind. The MoHSW is mapping these contributions.

LABORATORY AND EPIDEMIOLOGY:
- In the coming days, the Laboratory and Epidemiology Committee of the NTF will conduct additional trainings for lab technicians.

CASE MANAGEMENT AND PSYCHOSOCIAL:
The isolation units at Foya Hospital in Lofa County and Duside Hospital at Firestone Rubber Plantation in Margibi County can both accept Ebola cases; while the unit at JFK Medical Center in Montserrado County is expected to be operational as of Friday, 25 April. In the meantime, patients from Montserrado County can be sent to ELWA Hospital, which has created a holding area for suspected, probable and confirmed Ebola cases. The hospital needs some additional supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPEs), to properly manage this holding area.

The WHO is helping the Case Management Committee develop a training module that can be used for all viral hemorrhagic fevers, even after the Ebola epidemic subsides. The module includes training on infection control, psychosocial support and case management. It is already being provided to health workers in Foya, Lofa County.

The Case Management Committee of the NTF has printed laminated copies of its revised Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for health workers.

The Psychosocial Committee of the NTF plans to train 30 social workers this week.

SOCIAL MOBILIZATION:

In addition to the above UNICEF Response/C4D updates, the Social Mobilization Committee of the NTF has engaged additional local radio stations in Margibi to carry Ebola messages, bringing the total number to five stations; has distributed Ebola awareness materials to schools and churches in Margibi; and plans to train more gCHVs in three more communities in Bong County.

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL MANAGEMENT:

The MoHSW remains the authority on Ebola statistics and continues to manage information via several channels and mechanisms, including: regular SitReps; periodic press releases; appearances on national radio and the UNMIL Radio-produced daily Ebola talk show; maintenance of Ebola Hotlines; and support for the press situation room at the Ministry HQ in Congotown, Monrovia. All material used for social mobilisation for the outbreak should be cleared by the Ministry.

COORDINATION WITH CHTS, GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND OTHER MINISTRIES:

At the national-level, the various Committees of the NTF are meeting daily and often on weekends. Coordination meetings are also taking place on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

At the county-level, daily Task Force meetings are reportedly occurring in Lofa, Bong, Nimba, Margibi, Montserrado and Grand Cape Mount Counties, under the leadership of the respective County Superintendents.

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