UNICEF Liberia
Suspected Ebola Outbreak: SitRep #5
28 March 2014

Situation Overview

At the daily meeting of the National Task Force (NTF) on Health Emergencies, the Deputy Minister of Health, relevant staff from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) and key partners provided the following updates:

SURVEILLANCE, VERIFICATION AND CASE MANAGEMENT:

- One new suspected case of Ebola was reported in Ganta, Nimba County. The patient, a one-year-old girl child, has been isolated with her mother in a room of Ganta Methodist Hospital.
- The total number of reported suspected cases now stands at seven, including the previous six reported in Foya District, Lofa County, and the recently reported case in Ganta. Related death toll stands at four. **Note that the MoHSW corrected information given yesterday stating that eight cases had been reported in Foya. The Deputy Minister/Chief Medical Officer (CMO) is now informing there have only been six cases reported there.**
- A new specimen was taken from the patient in Ganta and will be tested by MSF-Guinea. Meanwhile, the four samples that were collected by MSF from Liberian health workers at the Lofa-Guinea border yesterday arrived in Guékédou, Guinea. MSF-Guinea will fly the samples to Conakry for testing in the MSF lab today. Lab results are expected by Sunday latest.
- MSF expects to establish its second lab in Guékédou, Guinea, by Sunday latest. This lab could facilitate faster testing on suspected cases in Liberia.
- Due to the recent detection of six new suspected Ebola cases in Conakry, four of which have been confirmed, the MSF-Guinea team that has planned to deploy into Lofa County is being called back to Conakry. A new negotiation will thus be required to ensure MSF deployment to Liberia.

BUDGET AND DONOR SUPPORT:

- The estimated three-month response budget stands at around US$ 1.2 million, though the costs may rise.
- The MoHSW is due to provide a list of needs to the Mano River Union (MRU ASAP. The Deputy Minister/CMO said she would have a letter ready today.
- The European Union (EU), specifically the Humanitarian Office (ECHO), is prepared to support MSF interventions in Liberia. The EU representative attending the NTF asked that the MoHSW write a special letter to the EU formally requesting the body to support bringing MSF to the country. Meanwhile, the representative from the Clinton Global Health Initiative suggested that the Deputy Minister/CMO also write directly to MSF-Brussels, where the organization’s Ebola Unit is based, requesting its support. MSF could help in the areas of Case Management and Laboratory and Surveillance, both of which are under-supported in the response budget.
- MoHSW reported a serious funding gap for surveillance and contact tracing, due to initial under-costing of these activities. No donor or partner has made commitments yet.

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL MANAGEMENT:

- The suspected case in Ganta has been isolated, indicating that directives by the MoHSW to clear all transfers of cases to other counties with the County Health Officer have been received at the county level and are being acted upon.
- To ensure further suspected cases are similarly contained, the MoHSW is asking all hospitals in the country to identify a room or area to use for isolation purposes. As previously reported, isolation areas have been identified by Foya Hospital in Lofa County and Sanniquellie Hospital in Nimba County, though both hospitals require tents to establish an actually unit. In Monrovia, JFK Hospital has suggested using its existing cholera unit as an Ebola isolation unit, and Redemption Hospital has offered space near the hospital that could be used for isolation, though the hospital would require a tent to establish the unit.
- To avoid the spread of misinformation about Ebola, the MoHSW has directed that all messages be channelled through its Emergency Communications Committee before being disseminated to the
The MoHSW is also continuing to issue a daily press release updating on the situation in the country, while the Deputy Minister is appearing on UNMIL Radio on a daily basis.

COORDINATION WITH COUNTY HEALTH TEAMS, GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AND OTHER MINISTRIES:

- The Deputy Minister spoke with the Ministry of Education (MoE) yesterday and requested that the MoE issue a directive to principals not to close their schools or turn students away due to fear of Ebola. The Minister of Education subsequently broadcast the message via the radio.
- More than 60 senior health and social workers completed a Training-of-Trainers (ToT) held at the MoHSW yesterday in Monrovia. The trainings were supported by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). National health officers and clinicians were among those trained. They will support further trainings of workers in Lofa, Bong and Nimba Counties.
- The MoHSW has deployed two teams to Nimba and Bong Counties to support response efforts. Each team is comprised of four members, including a clinician, a lab expert, an environmental expert and a health promotion expert. The teams will complement the existing teams deployed to Lofa County last weekend.
- The MoHSW reported that 40 personal protection equipment (PPE) kits and 200 litres of IV fluids have been supplied to the Montserrado County Health and Social Welfare Teams (CHSWT’s), for use in area hospitals. Ten additional PPEs were dispatched to Bong and Nimba County.
- A cross-border planning meeting will be held at Bo Waterside border crossing point (BXP) with Sierra Leone in Grand Cape Mount County, Liberia. Stakeholders from either side will attend the meeting and will discuss Ebola preparedness and response plans.
- Coordination meetings are being held regularly with members of the County Health and Social Welfare Teams (CHSWTs) and other stakeholders in Lofa and Nimba Counties.
- The MoHSW is sending the 50 PPEs provided by the Liberian National Red Cross yesterday to Lofa County for use by health workers there.

COORDINATION WITH PARTNERS:

- Partners continue to work closely with the MoHSW to coordinate the response. UNICEF continues to lead Health Promotion efforts, with heavy engagement from the Communications for Development team, and to support WASH efforts. Save the Children, Plan International, the Liberian National Red Cross, UNFPA, Global Communities and IRC are also actively engaged in various initiatives.
- Clinton Global Initiative, USAID, WHO, the EU and the French Embassy are engaged in coordination meetings and are seeking ways of providing support.
- Offers of support from the Belgian and Swiss Embassies remain standing.
- Radio stations such as UNMIL Radio, ELBC and Radio Advent are continuing to feature Ebola-related programming on their stations. Community radio stations are also featuring Ebola messages.
- ArcelorMittal has attended the NTF meetings and their representative indicated a willingness to assist in Nimba County, where the company has an iron ore mining area, if needed.

UNICEF Response

HEALTH AND COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT (C4D):

- UNICEF’s Health and C4D programmes continue to spearhead the efforts of the Health Promotion Committee of the NTF.
- All 30 UNICEF partner community radio stations are airing MoHSW-approved Ebola messages developed by the Health Promotion Committee. UNICEF is asking partners to assist them in getting the messages featured on the remaining 10 community stations in Liberia. UNICEF would like to intensify the airing of the messages using these 10 additional stations, and would like to improve overall monitoring.
- UNICEF is supporting the general Community Health Volunteers (gCHVs) in its network.
- At the suggestion of UNICEF, the MoHSW sent letters to Lonestar and Cellcom – two major telecommunications companies in Liberia – requesting in-kind bulk text messaging services to ensure swift dissemination of MoHSW-approved text messages on Ebola.
- Three Ebola spot messages and dramas have been developed by UNICEF and are being cleared by the MoHSW. These messages have been translated into the five most common vernaculars used in Lofa County, as well as into simple Liberian English and French. UNICEF will now work to have them
translated into the remaining 10 Liberian vernaculars so that they can be used countrywide. Save the Children has offered to help UNICEF disseminate both the messages and the dramas in Nimba and Bong Counties.

- A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for health workers in contact with Ebola patients is being finalized by the MoHSW with considerable technical input from UNICEF. Save the Children will print 10,000 copies of the SOP, in the form of posters or flyers.
- The brochure on Ebola was finalized by UNICEF and approved by the MoHSW. Plan International has printed 15,000 copies, which are being distributed. UNFPA will print another 15,000 copies.
- A second set of CD’s featuring the latest press conference on Ebola by the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICAT) has been produced and distributed to all 15 counties. It will be recalled that another set of CDs was produced and distributed to the 15 counties, as well, following the initial MICAT press conference on 24 March.

**WASH:**

- In addition to the pre-positioned supplies previously provided by UNICEF to CHSWT’s for WASH activities such as hand washing, UNICEF continues to provide technical support to the MoHSW and the NTF WASH Committee.
- The MoHSW sent a letter formally requesting tents for isolation units from UNICEF, and has committed to providing two tents for this purpose. UNICEF has additional tents that could be used to construct these units. However, UNICEF is not providing the additional tents until/unless an Ebola case is confirmed, and will carefully manage the distribution of the tents in that case so as to target the affected areas.

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