African Ebola Epidemic Shows Signs of Winding Down

By ACSH Staff — October 8, 2015

For a week now, there have been no new reported cases of Ebola in the three West African nations at the heart of the most recent epidemic.

Don't worry, you haven't unknowingly clicked on a story from 2014. This is today's news. Despite the fact that Ebola disappeared from headlines in America almost a year ago, the epidemic in West Africa is ongoing, and has thus far claimed over 11,000 lives. It is the deadliest Ebola outbreak in recorded history.

Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have been hit hardest by the virus, with almost all of the fatalities from the disease having occurred in one of these three countries. Currently, the World Health Organization only considers the outbreak to be continuing in Guinea and Sierra Leone.

The WHO considers an epidemic to be over when no new cases have been reported for 42 consecutive days. Liberia initially reached this milestone in May, however isolated cases popped up in June and July, causing the declaration to be repealed. Liberia was declared Ebola free once again on September 3.

Since the outbreak appears to be winding down, the focus will now turn to preventing or containing future scourges. Many critics have lambasted the WHO for responding too slowly to the outbreak, before the August 2014 spike in cases. They note that the WHO did not brief the United Nations on the outbreak's severity, which resulted in the agency lacking the necessary resources to contain the crisis in its early stages.

It's also been asserted that the WHO was aware of the outbreak as early as April of last year, but did not initially intervene with a sufficient response.

Critics contend that the WHO's initial messages to those in affected regions was too bleak, and focused on the fact that there was no known treatment for Ebola. Others say that a more positive or informative message to West Africans could have have curtailed some cultural practices, like funeral and burial customs, which exacerbated the spread of the virus.

There has been some good news through the outbreak, as progress on an Ebola vaccine has moved forward. [1]