

Information Saves Lives

Media Newsletter
Issue #6 - March 27-3 April



Welcome to the Internews Newsletter for media in Liberia. This newsletter is created with the intent to support the work of local media in reporting about Ebola and Ebola-related issues in Liberia. Internews welcomes feedback, comments and suggestions from all media receiving this newsletter and invites them to forward, share and re-post this newsletter as widely as possible.



New insights on healed Ebola patients in Liberia

Monrovia, Liberia – Healed Ebola patients can live a normal and even extraordinary life, says Professor John Fankhauser, the Medical Director at ELWA hospital in Monrovia, which is concerned with healed Ebola patients. “Liberia has nearly 1500 treated Ebola patients,” says Fankhauser, “all of them going about with their usual daily activities and even doing better than they were in the past.”

According to Prof. Fankhauser, who regularly receives and interacts with the healed patients, all of them are immune to the virus but the duration of the immunity is yet to be established. “The immunity varies from person to person,” he added.

“Chronic pain, appetite loss, headaches, eye problems and post-traumatic stress are among the most frequent problems reported by some healed patients.”

In March 2015, a Liberian woman died of Ebola – which has claimed more than 3,900 lives so far, according to government figures. Several reliable news sources have quoted the government as saying the woman contracted the virus from her husband who was healed of Ebola.

The death of the Liberian woman reshaped the message on the sexual lives of healed Ebola patients, which was initially made public by the Liberian government. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare now recommends indefinite safe sex and abstinence within a three-month period.

Prof. Fankhauser suggests that patients tested negative in Ebola Treatment Units should abstain from sex for up to 90 days. It is feared that the virus which lives in the semen and vaginal secretions of healed Ebola patients could also infect their sexual partners. “Some healed patients even experience sexual malfunction,” he revealed.

Besides the physical effects, healed Ebola patients equally suffer stigma within their communities. One organization that has suggested concrete ways of eliminating stigma is the NGO *Médecins sans frontières*, also known in English as Doctors Without Borders. They recommend a replacement of the name “Ebola Survivors,” that has further ostracised the healed patients from their own communities. Other organisations suggest “survivors” could be replaced with “healed patients.”

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Swelling concerns for Ebola Treatment Units as new cases decline

As new Ebola cases decline in Liberia, citizens' concern about the existence of Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs) within their Counties has been swelling. The local media stationed in all 15 counties have been reporting rumors and unanswered questions from communities that fuel fear and mistrust.

In Grand Bassa for example, people are asking why ETUs do exist, even though there have been no new Ebola cases for several months now. Speaking along similar lines are residents from Nimba who also suggest all ETUs should be shut down because they spark more panic and mistrust for health workers.

Several organizations fighting Ebola including the World Health Organization (WHO) have been quick to respond to citizens' concern. WHO recently released a rapid guidance on the decommissioning of Ebola care facilities and a checklist for terminal cleaning and decontamination of Ebola care facilities that clearly address safety concerns from citizens if ETUs would be dismantled.

According to International Organization for Migration (IOM) IOM ETUs in Bomi and Grand Bassa counties will progressively scale down their operations, in coordination with County Health Teams, and could be shut down completely by the end of May 2015. IOM adds that their ETU in Sinje would still exist for some additional months after May.

The Liberian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) also coordinates the closure of ETUs.

When Liberia would be declared Ebola-free, plans for ETUs would hinge on the priorities of County Health Teams (CHTs) in respective counties. Staff seconded by MoHSW will resume to their initial duty posts, while others could be involved in other non ETU activities depending on the available funds.

All ETU assets will be disinfected as per guidelines from WHO and MoHSW and there will be no risk of contamination after the decommissioning exercise is finalized.

Reopened borders open new Ebola concerns from Liberians

The Liberian government reopened its borders in February with key trading partners – Guinea and Sierra Leone - after seeing marked recovery from the Ebola crisis. Since then, concerns about potential cross-border Ebola transmission have been rife, especially along border counties.

Citizens have been quick to point out the cause of Liberia's Ebola crisis, blaming it on the government's failure to close its borders with Guinea when the crisis was first reported there. Now that Liberia is on the way to being declared Ebola-free – with no new confirmed cases reported since the end of March –, border safety, security and surveillance are some of the issues being raised in Montserrado and Bomi counties.

Only the Ivorian side of Liberia borders remains closed and training of border officials with Guinea and Sierra Leone were intensified following the reopening of borders.

Community-based surveillance has been bolstered by development partners fighting the disease in all the counties that have borders with those two countries.

Supplies are being provided to ports of entry as well. Many entry routes have also been upgraded from an infrastructural point of view to be able to conduct safe screening.

At the moment, safe screening and the ability to safely isolate and refer to suspected Ebola cases for secondary screening have also been put in place.

Development partners recommend communities to be aware of Ebola symptoms and report to County Health Team members in case they have concerns. Community-based surveillance is supported by various local and international NGOs operating at the border. Liberia depends on imports from its neighbours for around 90 percent of its goods.

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Citizens' Feedback

REOPENING OF SCHOOLS

There are speculations that schools are ill-equipped with Ebola prevention kits.

Lofa

Bomi residents say schools have reopened, classes are very effective and Ebola prevention measures are strictly respected.

Bomi

People in Montserrado say school authorities do not encourage students and pupils to respect Ebola prevention measures.

Montserrado

Some people wish that the Liberian side of the border with Ivory Coast would be closed.

Grand Kru



The residents ask why students and pupils are being encouraged to go to school even though the country is not Ebola-free.

Nimba

Citizens say that Ebola prevention measures are not respected in schools within Grand Gedeh County. They add that the basic Ebola kits are absent.

Grand Gedeh

People say that schools in River Gee County that were initially shut down for their lack of compliance on Ebola prevention measures have now been reopened. They add that the closure came against a backdrop of corrupt meetings held between school authorities and the health and education Ministries.

River Gee

The residents ask why students and pupils are being encouraged to go to school even though the country is not Ebola-free.

Maryland

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Citizens' Feedback

BORDERS

People in Bong County are suggesting that their borders with Ebola-stricken countries (Guinea and Sierra Leone) should be closed because the World Health Organization (WHO) has not declared them Ebola-free.

Bong

Residents of Grand Cape Mount County are advising that a border closure with Guinea and Sierra Leone would keep all three countries safe.

Bomi

People are asking why the borders with Guinea and Sierra Leone have been opened despite their insignificant progress in their fight against Ebola.

Montserrado

Sinoe residents question the Liberian government's decision to reopen its borders with Guinea and Sierra Leone despite failed attempts to effectively fight back Ebola in those countries.

Sinoe



Nimba residents report that the Liberian side of its border with Ivory Coast has been opened but the Ivorian government has denied doing the same. Also, people are reporting that since the curfew was lifted, crime waves have dropped.

Nimba

Citizens are reporting that the Grand Gedeh side of the border is still closed, suggesting that it should be reopened for cross-border trade.

Grand Gedeh

Some people suggest a border closure with Guinea and Sierra Leone for fear of an Ebola spillover into Liberia.

River Gee

People are reporting that food distributed by the World Food Program (WFP) in the County has been widely accepted by Ebola survivors and orphans who initially feared it contained Ebola.

River Cess

FOOD DISTRIBUTION

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Citizens' Feedback

EBOLA VACCINE & TREATMENT UNITS



Citizens are asking why Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs) still exist although the country has effectively rolled back the disease.

Grand Bassa

People are suggesting that Ebola survivors should be quarantine for three months before being sent back into the communities. This will stop them from infecting their wives and partners, they add.

Grand Cape Mount

In Margibi, people are reporting that Ebola prevention measures have been widely abandoned by most citizens who believe Ebola no longer exists in Liberia.

Margibi

People in River Cess County are enquiring when they could start visiting sites where the bodies of the Ebola victims were buried.

River Cess

In Grand Kru County, citizens are suggesting that ETUs should be shut down because they have gone for several months without any reported case of an Ebola patient.

Grand Kru

In River Gee County, citizens suggest that the Liberian government and its development partners should quarantine Ebola survivors for three months before they can be released into the communities.

River Gee

Residents are asking if the dismantled Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs) in Maryland County will now serve as Isolation Centers for other deadly infectious diseases.

Maryland

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Rumors Reporting: Update since 27 March - 3 April 2015

Routine & Ebola Vaccines

Rumors from local people	Well-sourced and accurate responses
<p>Rivercess</p> <p>It is being rumored that the Ebola vaccine is harmful and primarily targets school children.</p> <p>Grand Gedeh County</p> <p>Citizens rumor that the Ebola vaccine is intended to infect many more people.</p> <p>Bong County</p> <p>People are saying that the Ebola vaccine has been disguised as a routine immunization.</p> <p>Nimba County</p> <p>People rumor the Ebola vaccine will infect many more Liberians and are discouraging volunteers from receiving it.</p> <p>Grand Cape Mount County</p> <p>Citizens in Grand Cape Mount County rumor that the Ebola vaccine is a government ploy to infect Liberians with the disease and continue to sponge on Ebola funds.</p>	<p>The Ebola trial vaccine is not provided to children. Instead, it is strongly suggested for all children receive only the routine vaccines, which can be found in all clinics and hospitals. These are the same vaccines the health Ministry has been giving to Liberian children for many years.</p> <p>These vaccines are free and safe.</p> <p>The senior Liberian scientist involved in the vaccine trials, Stephen Kennedy says there is no danger because the piece of the Zaire strain that has been put into the vaccine is very little and also a weak strain that it cannot and will not cause Ebola. So it is impossible that any one of the volunteers will contract Ebola from the vaccine. The scientists are well aware of how important the support of local people will be if this trial is to work.</p> <p>No child will receive the Ebola vaccine. Right now the Ebola vaccine it is only given in Monrovia at JFK Hospital to adults from 18. It is not given to pregnant women or children and it has been approved for human trial because it is safe.</p> <p>For FAQ about the vaccine see this document here.</p> <p><i>*For more information interviews, Internews strongly recommends journalists/communicators to contact:</i></p> <p>UNICEF Liberia Rukshan Ratnam, Communications Officer Phone: 0770267110 rratnam@unicef.org</p> <p>UNICEF Liberia Helene Sandbu Ryeng, Communications Specialist Phone: 0770267943 hsryeng@unicef.org</p> <p>The Liberia-US Joint Research Partnership Stephen B. Kennedy, MD, MPH, FLCP Phone: 0886645830 kennedys@lpgmc.org</p> <p>National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) H. Clifford Lane, MD, Clinical Director, National Institutes for Health (NIH) Inquiries doepel@nih.gov</p>

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Border

Bomi County

The people rumor that the Liberian government is seeking more money from its donors by keeping its borders with Ebola-stricken countries open for possible cross-border transmission.

Montserrado County

People rumor that President Ellen Johnson signed a partnership agreement with development partners to spread Ebola in Liberia and leave its borders open with Ebola-affected nations.

It was the government's decision to reopen its borders with all three neighboring countries – Guinea, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone. However the Ivorian border remains closed to Liberia only. The borders were opened for several reasons including economic concerns raised by citizens who relied on cross-border trade to feed their families. It should be noted that community-based surveillance has been bolstered by various local and international NGOs operating at the borders.

It is recommended that communities should be aware about Ebola symptoms and report to County Health Team members in case they have concerns. Several actions including safe-screening including the possibility of safely isolating and referring secondary screening have been put in place at crossing points.

**For more information interviews, Internews strongly recommends journalists/communicators to contact:*

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Ebola funds

Montserrado County

People in Montserrado County claim that the latest Ebola case was a false alarm sounded by the Liberian government and sought to persuade its donors for more Ebola funds.

Margibi County & Grand Cape Mount County

In Margibi, people are referring to the Liberian president's frequent visits out of the country as possible attempts to usher in western strategies that could help spread of Ebola in Liberia.

People should note that the woman who was Liberia's sole remaining known Ebola patient died at a treatment centre in the Monrovia in late March. The case was Liberia's first in weeks and it set back efforts to halt a virus that has killed more than nearly 3,900 people. Liberian authorities say the woman, who died in Monrovia, may have contracted Ebola through sex with a survivor. This last detail is NOT confirmed yet.

Media should continue encouraging their communities to follow the Ebola preventative measures and to trust that organizations responding to the Ebola outbreak have been able to trace the people with whom the woman came in contact. Media should remind their communities that the fight against Ebola is a collaborative strategy by the government, development partners, donors and the local population.

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<p>Grand Kru County</p> <p>In Grand Kru County, people are saying that the Ebola vaccine is intended to infect many more citizens because the Liberian government seeks to maintain the flow of Ebola funds.</p>	<p><i>*For more information Internews recommends journalists/communicators to contact:</i></p> <p>Incident Management System / Ebola operation Center Francis Kateh, Deputy Incident Manager Phone: 0776434603 frankateh@aol.com</p> <p>United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response Dr. Joa Okech, FCM Margibi & Montserrado County Phone:0775263882 okechojony@yahoo.com</p>
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Schools

<p>Montserrado County</p> <p>It is being rumored that schools in Montserrado will be closed because a new case of Ebola was discovered.</p> <p>Lofa County</p> <p>Lofa citizens rumor that parents are pulling out their children from schools and initiating them into witchcraft practices which they believe could protect them from Ebola.</p> <p>Bomi County</p> <p>Bomi citizens speculate that the government's decision to reopen schools is a ploy to spread Ebola nation-wide.</p> <p>Grand Bassa</p> <p>It is being rumored that school benches have been infected with Ebola.</p> <p>Grand Kru</p> <p>People say teachers are hiring secret agents to infect school children with Ebola.</p>	<p>Media should continue encouraging parents to send their children to school while practicing surveillance because all schools in Montserrado are well-equipped and practice Ebola prevention measures.</p> <p>All personnel in schools is monitoring the situation to make sure that all the children are safe despite concerns about the woman who was discovered recently with Ebola in Montserrado. Media should also try to encourage parents not to resort to witch craft practices in the fight against Ebola.</p> <p>Media outlets that are interested in supporting the local social mobilization efforts in this matter can contact Internews Journalism Trainer Arwen Kidd at akidd@internews.org to have contact information of local social mobilizations teams.</p> <p><i>*For more information Internews recommends journalists/communicators to contact:</i></p> <p>United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Liberia Jacob Kersey, Education Program Specialist Phone: 0770267556/0880897960 jkersey@unicef.org</p> <p>National Teachers Association in Liberia Samuel Johnson, Secretary General Phone: 0886472496 samuelyjohnsonsr@gmail.com</p>
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Ebola Treatment Unites (ETUs)

Montserrado

It is being rumored that all members of a family in Montserrado recently died of Ebola and their bodies were secretly taken to an ETU by burial teams.

River Cess

People claim that Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs) charged \$500 USD to bury a dead Ebola patient.

There is a clearly established procedure for Ebola burials. These procedures are transparent to the public and should and cannot be done in secrecy (without informing) from family relatives.

The Liberian government has always allowed families to bury Ebola victims in a special plot of land instead of requiring the cremated of the dead, as part of efforts to prevent the spread of the virus.

The government, through the Traditional Council of Liberia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and a United States based non-governmental organization, Global Communities, acquired a 25-acre parcel of land, which was being uses as a national cemetery.

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Effects of prevention measures

Rivercess

People believe that washing hands with water that contains chlorine could cause cancer.

There is no established link between hand-washing with chlorine and cancer. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people are advised not to drink chlorine water, and also not to put chlorine water in mouth or eyes.

Journalists can find more information here.

**For more information Internews recommends journalists/communicators to contact:*

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

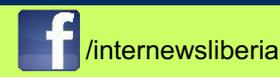
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<p>Lofa</p> <p>It is being rumored that doctors who successfully treated Ebola patients are now switching to infect many more Liberians.</p>	<p>Fears and mistrust could be dismissed as journalists could engage in a strong media action that will discredit complacency and promote surveillance. It is important to remind local communities that Ebola safety measures must be strictly followed. Ebola is still very real in the country and Media are encouraged to invite local doctors or nurses or social mobilizations teams to come to talk on air about the current situation.</p> <p><i>*For more information / Internews strongly recommends journalists/communicators to contact:</i></p>
<p>Montserrado County</p> <p>People rumor that Ebola no longer exists in any part of Liberia.</p>	<p>Environmental Inspection Isaiah K. Paye, Head of Montserrado County Phone: 0886512388</p> <p>Public Health Initiative Liberia Kuoh Quenuah Phone: 0886411638 qkuoh@yahoo.com</p> <p>Médecins sans frontières (MSF) Judit Rius, Liasion Officer Phone: 0775065878 msfocb-monrovia-LiasionOfficer@brussels.msf.org</p>

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Resources for the media

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Checklist for terminal cleaning and decontamination of Ebola Care Facilities

<http://bit.ly/1CUfeK9>

Rapid Guidance on the Decommissioning of Ebola Care Facilities

<http://bit.ly/1a4T0e6>

West Africa – Ebola Outbreak, Fact Sheet #28, Fiscal Year (Fy) 2015

<http://bit.ly/1ycHKrP>

Internews Humanitarian Newsletter Issue 3

<http://bit.ly/1NTfhc8>

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Liberia's last Ebola patient dies from virus

<http://bit.ly/1FVv3DQ>

Ebola-hit Liberia sets out on road to recovery

<http://bit.ly/1DJ6rOs>