

# Information Saves Lives

Media Newsletter  
 Issue #10 - April 27-May 1



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.



## Psychosocial concerns mount as Liberia awaits Ebola-free declaration

A ten-year plan to restore healthcare services is underway in Liberia following an official address by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on 1 April 2015. But as the government points to its own weaknesses in the training of health care professionals, improving and expanding services at primary and secondary healthcare centers, upgrading county hospitals and establishing three regional referral hospitals in the country, several NGOs have moved in with assistance aimed at eliminating post-traumatic stress disorders.

One of them is the Carter Center in Liberia. According to a press release issued in March, the US-headquartered organisation assisted its Mental Health Program in Liberia by partnering with the Liberia Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. They sent out a new class of 21 clinicians who joined the effort to continue improving access to mental health services in Liberia. Also, 144 trained mental health clinicians now work largely in primary care clinics and hospitals across all 15 counties to provide the much needed care.

The country aims at expanding access to mental health care to 70 percent of the population within the next few years, the Liberian government says. Previously, the nation's 3.8 million had only one psychiatrist to meet the needs of at least 300,000 Liberians suffering from mental illnesses, according to the release.

Among several challenges the clinicians are encountering is working in existing Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs) and providing psychosocial support to individuals and families affected by the Ebola virus. While every Liberian county now has at least three mental health clinicians, there remains a need to build up services in places with immense treatment gaps. The largest concentration of Carter Center-trained clinicians, which numbers 43, serves a population of more than 1 million in Montserrado County.

Meanwhile, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is focusing on some of the areas that were worst hit in Monrovia. The IRC works with communities in some of the worst-affected areas to build the capacity of community leaders, youth and children through psychosocial support. This includes training teachers on how to talk to students about Ebola, psychological first aid, and how to prevent stigma.

### Growing trauma in communities

Emergency responses, ranging from free medical supplies to financial benefits, have been building especially in vulnerable communities. Community members have been reuniting Ebola orphans and displaced persons with their family relatives.

"Communities had a hard time dealing with anger toward those who got infected and infected others," Dr. Janice Cooper, the Carter Center's country lead for its mental health work in Liberia said in a statement. "There was a lot of discord around survivors and whether they continued to be infectious. In general, there was just a lot of loss very quickly for individuals and a strain on community dynamics." The Carter Center sponsored community dialogues to foster healing and gave Ebola-specific training to more than 200 mental health clinicians and other health workers.

According to its statement, the Center will respond to psychosocial needs in Liberia for the next three years, well after the epidemic is over, with counselling, community dialogues, anti-stigma campaigns, further training for mental health providers, and the creation of a cadre of child mental health clinicians to be deployed to schools.

"Taking care of orphans and vulnerable children and seeing that survivors get resources available to them will be a priority for a long time," Dr. Cooper noted.

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## Sources:

### **New Graduates Bring Number of Trained Mental Health Clinicians in Liberia to 144**

<http://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/liberia-mh-030515.html>

### **The International Rescue Committee Welcomes Sierra Leone and Liberian Governments' Decision to Reopen Schools**

<http://www.rescue.org/press-releases/international-rescue-committee-welcomes-sierra-leone-liberian-governments%E2%80%99-decision-r>

### **International Rescue Committee**

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## **Speculations on border restrictions heighten as Liberia nears 42 days**

As Liberia inches closer to its 42 days mark of no new found Ebola case, citizens are becoming inquisitive about what responders are discussing in relation to border controls. The feedback gathered mostly concerns the counties bordering Guinea and Sierra Leone – all badly hit by the pandemic.

Hilary Dorleh, Emergency Response Manager for the US-based NGO Global Communities, says at the moment, there has not been any joint task force meeting with regards to the county's control should Liberia be declared Ebola free. He adds that as long as Sierra Leone and Guinea remain affected, Liberia's border restrictions must be tightened, citing the case of neighboring Ivory Coast.

Speaking along similar lines is Alessandra Donvito, Emergency Coordinator for the Danish Refugee Council in Liberia. Donvito says all Liberian borders with Guinea, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone have been opened. But although the Ivorian side remains partially opened during the nights, it is completely closed during the day.

Donvito noted that Liberia strongly depends on its neighbors for cross-border trade and that informal border crossings are being strictly controlled.

USAID, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Global Communities, and a host of other NGOs, is working closely with traditional leaders and local health officials to track informal border movement in far-flung communities, to ensure that community health workers monitorose who may have Ebola and ensure they receive treatment. Additionally, Global Communities is coordinating and supporting meetings among town-level traditional leaders and between Guinean and Liberian traditional, health and administrative officials to foster localized coordination and information sharing.

Border officials are continuing to improve the screening and triage station by putting in solar lighting and toilet facilities, and are already building stations at the county's other crossing points.

Official statements from the Liberian government on stringent border concerns will be made on 9 May 2015, should the country succeed in being declared Ebola-free by the WHO.

## Sources:

### **Executive Mansion**

<http://www.emansion.gov.lr/2content.php?sub=82&related=30&third=82&pg=sp>

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## **From community volunteers to health workers: Stakeholders discuss possible strategies**

Although the strategic plan for the National Community Health Services (CHS) in Liberia ends in 2015, it has clearly reflected the need for a community health scheme within the 10-year National Plan. CHS' plan that rolled out 2011, improved the health and social welfare status of the population of Liberia on an at community levels.

Among some key objectives of the CHS's five-year plan are health promotion and health seeking behaviour activities, increase access to and utilization of quality health services, and equal access to all Liberians.

At the moment, social mobilizers are discussing possible ways of coordinating and bolstering the existing community health structures in a bid to support systems at all levels. They are also seeking ways of accelerating the implementation of a standardized package of community health services.

Efforts are also geared at strengthening health care in all communities. They include building the capacity of communities to contribute to the reduction of maternal, newborn and child morbidity and mortality and to address issues of public health concern; ensuring quality service delivery of a standardized package of community health services; strengthening support systems for implementation of community health services and strengthening pre-service and in-service training for health workers (professional and Community Health Volunteers).

However, the Ebola outbreak crippled the health care system in Liberia, and exposed a lack of clear health

protocols and guidelines and limited directives on how to stay safe in the wake of an epidemic. It also uncovered the need for new staffs ranging from community mobilizers, health promoters and contact tracers.

In December 2014, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in a public address is quoted as saying: "I could not agree more about building local capacity. Our 10-year health workforce plan is about building capacity at all levels, particularly at the bottom. It's like a pyramid. We will train ... community health workers to provide basic services ... we are going to make the final push to fight Ebola now by supporting community workers to get the job done."

The Ministry of Health recognises the need for a structured, regulated and financially motivated community health workforce. They intend to transform Community Health Volunteers into health workers.

In Liberia, 53 percent of the population (less than 2.1 million people) live in rural areas, while 29 percent (1.2 million people) lack access to the most basic health services as they live more than 5km away (1 hour walk) from a health facility, according to a presentation by the Community Health Service in Liberia during the Social and Mobilization Meeting on 5 May 2015. It adds that vaccination coverage, child mortality and maternal mortality indicators are worse in rural areas.

At present, the Community Health Service Department (CHSD) is finalizing the work plan for 2015-2016 based.

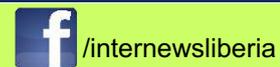
## Sources:

### **Overview of Community Health Services in Liberia**

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B1D2eBmYrnOxdDkwTkFTVHJSZjg&authuser=0>

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## Aid agencies warn against complacency amid an Ebola-free Liberia

Although Liberia has been officially declared Ebola-free, the World Health Organization and other aid agencies are warning against complacency in Liberia, citing all possible transmission channels including borders and the hunting of banned animals.

Speaking to [Aljazeera](#), Peter Jan Graaf, the head of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency, urged vigilance until the worst-ever recorded outbreak of the virus was extinguished in neighboring Guinea and Sierra Leone.

No new cases were reported in 42 days - twice the maximum incubation period for the deadly disease.

"We're proud of what we collectively managed to do but we need to remain vigilant," he said. "The virus is not yet out of the region and as long as the virus is in the region we're still all of us potentially at risk."

Medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) has also voiced similar concerns.

Mariateresa Cacciapuoti, Head of MSF Liberia says: "We can't take our foot off the gas until all three countries record 42 days with no cases." MSF points to the need to improve cross-border surveillance to prevent Ebola re-emerging in Liberia.

"The Liberian government and the Liberian people have worked hard to help us achieve 42 days of zero Ebola cases, but that hard work could be undone in an instant," says Ms Cacciapuoti.

At least 4,700 of those have been in Liberia, where the outbreak peaked between August and October, with hundreds of cases a week, sparking international alarm.

Helped by the visible US military presence, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's government last week launched a national awareness campaign to stem the infectious disease, which is spread by physical contact with sick people.

### Heightened surveillance

The UN Special Envoy on Ebola, David Nabarro, said this week that Liberian authorities had pledged to maintain heightened surveillance for at least a year after being declared Ebola-free on Saturday.

Nabarro suggested that, even though fewer than 20 new cases were reported in Guinea and Sierra Leone last week, it could take months to get to zero.

International aid organizations were forced to step in as the Ebola outbreak ravaged the region's poorly equipped and understaffed healthcare systems.

Nearly two hundred Liberian health workers died after contracting Ebola, and the epidemic decimated the country's already fragile national health system. "It's time for health needs to be addressed as a priority," says Ms Cacciapuoti. "Liberians must feel confident they can go to hospital once again and have their healthcare needs looked after. The international community must support Liberia – and Guinea and Sierra Leone – in rebuilding a strong and affordable national health system with adequate human and material resources."

As flagged in the MSF report [Pushed to the Limit and Beyond](#), released in late March, the Ebola epidemic has exposed "the weakness of health systems in developing countries [and] the paralysis and sluggishness of international aid." The report highlighted the "global coalition of inaction" that dragged on for several months before the international community woke up to the threat of Ebola – despite repeated pleas from MSF for help.

"Quite simply, we were all too late. The world – including MSF – was slow to start the response from the beginning," says Henry Gray, head of MSF Ebola operations in Brussels. "That lesson has been learnt, at the cost of thousands of lives, and we can only hope it will prevent the same thing happening again in the future."

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#### World Health Organization

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### Resources:

WHO declares Liberia Ebola-free

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/medical-charity-declares-liberia-ebola-free-150509084225416.html>

#### Ebola: Pushed to the limit and beyond

<http://www.msf.org/article/ebola-pushed-limit-and-beyond>

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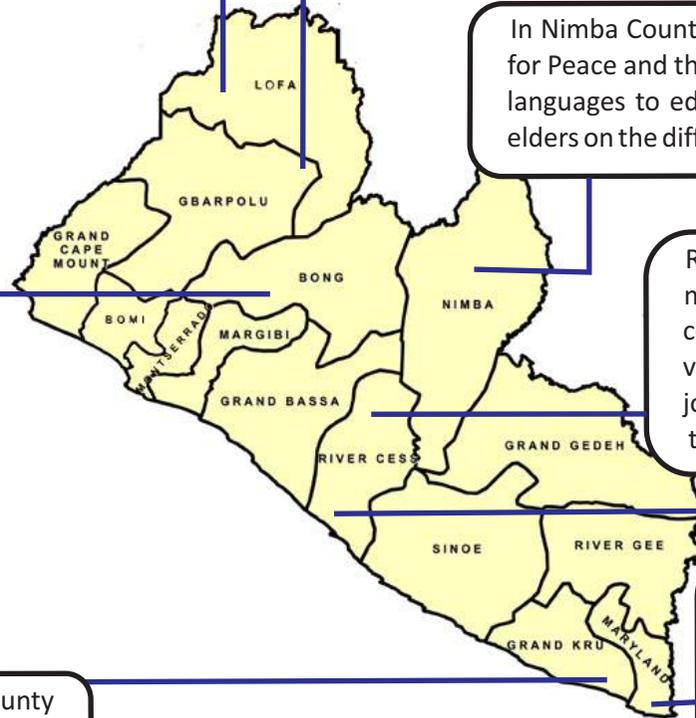
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## Citizens' Feedback



### ROUTINE IMMUNIZATION



Citizens are asking why health workers in Lofa County have rolled out the routine vaccine at this time of the year. They fear it is the Ebola vaccine, referring to an Ebola outbreak in their county at the same time last year.

#### Lofa

The residents would like to know the difference between the routine vaccine and the Ebola vaccine.

#### Gbarpolu

In Nimba County, the people are reporting that an NGO called Crusaders for Peace and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare are now using local languages to educate traditional chiefs, paramount rulers and traditional elders on the differences between routine and Ebola vaccines.

#### Nimba

People are saying that health workers in Fuamah district have trained a team of volunteers within Bong County, who would move into all communities, educating people on the differences between the Ebola and routine vaccine.

#### Bong

The people say that their community radio has been running radio talk shows and playing recorded messages on the upcoming routine vaccine exercise.

Residents in River Cess are reporting that the health ministry has been organizing awareness campaigns in their county on the differences between the Ebola and routine vaccines. They cite traditional chiefs, paramount rulers, journalists with Echo Radio and traditional elders of Zoe town, as some of the targeted people in the campaign.

#### River Cess

In Grand Kru County, Care International, UNICEF and the County Health Team are educating people on the differences between the Ebola and the measles vaccine.

#### Grand Kru

Citizens are reporting that the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Global Youth Organization trained 150 community volunteers on distinguishing between the routine and Ebola vaccines. They add that the exercise was aimed at helping them educate others elsewhere in the county.

#### Maryland

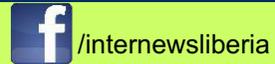
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## Citizens' Feedback



### RAINY SEASON

In Gbarpolu County, the County Health Team and an NGO known as Child Fund have been using Everybody's Business, a radio talk show to discourage people from thinking that mosquito treated bed nets were impregnated with Ebola.

**Gbarpolu**

### PREVENTION MEASURES

Citizens of Tewor, a small district in camp three of Grand Cape Mount County, say they no longer wash their hands because their buckets are broken.

**Grand Cape Mount**

### SCHOOLS

Residents are reporting a shortage of Ebola prevention kits in schools.

**Gbarpolu**

People say that residents are now practicing safe and dignified burials.

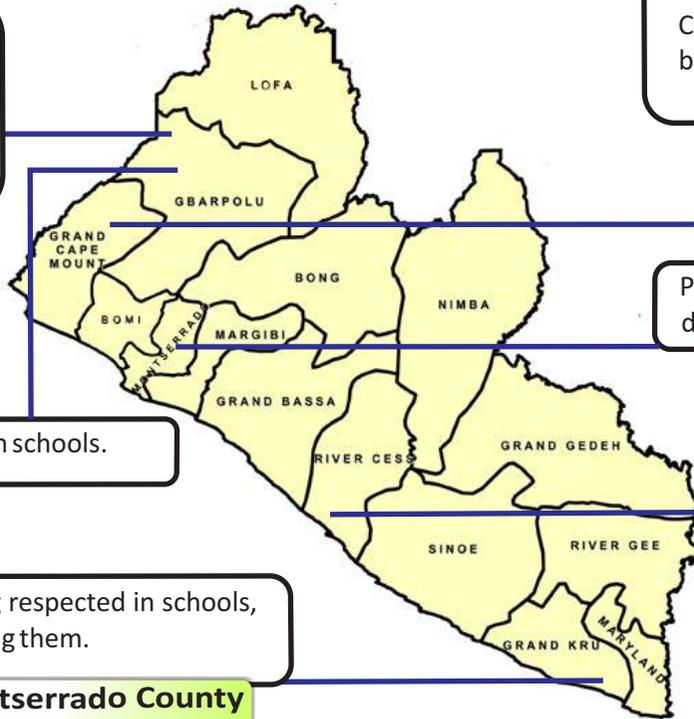
**Montserrado**

People say although Ebola prevention measures are being respected in schools, communities within Montserrado County are not respecting them.

**Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Maryland & Montserrado County**

People are saying the Ebola prevention measures are not being respected in River Cess County because according to them, there is no more Ebola in Liberia.

**River Cess**



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## Rumors Reporting

### Rainy Season

Rumors from local people	Well-sourced and accurate responses
<p><b>Montserrado County</b></p> <p>Citizens rumor that officials managing the Ebola funds are secretly planning for a possible outbreak of the disease during the rainy season.</p>	<p>The rainy season is fast intensifying in Liberia. In remote areas which are difficult to access, rain, mud and floods will soon make outbreak control efforts more difficult. The UN Secretary-General called rain "a complicating factor" that can seriously interfere with response efforts.</p> <p>As long as there are <i>any</i> Ebola cases in the region, Liberia remains at risk for re-ignited outbreaks. That's why the World Health Organization <u>decided</u> in April 2015 that the Ebola outbreak remains a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). The risk remains that the disease could spread within the affected nations and internationally.</p> <p><i>*For more information or interviews, Internews recommends journalists/communicators to contact:</i></p> <p><b>World Health Organization, Liberia</b> Judit Rius, Liason Officer Phone: 0775065878 msfocb-monrovia-LiasonOfficer@brussels.msf.org</p>
<p><b>Maryland County</b></p> <p>Maryland citizens rumor that there will be another outbreak of Ebola during the rainy season.</p>	
<p><b>River Cess County</b></p> <p>River Cess County residents rumor that the routine vaccine will weaken the immune system of their children and make them very vulnerable to another outbreak of Ebola during this year's rainy season.</p>	

### Food Distribution

<p><b>River Cess County</b></p> <p>Citizens are rumoring that among several foods distributed by the World Food Program, only salt contains Ebola. They say citizens should not consume it because they will be infected with Ebola.</p>	<p>According to the <u>European Food Safety Authority</u> there is no evidence that Ebola virus can be transmitted through food. It further stated that 'To date there have been no reported human cases of Ebola infection from the consumption of these food. On their part, the World Food Program (WFP) in Liberia says they ration food to individuals and households that have experienced Ebola cases or have been isolated because of contact with Ebola cases, as well as to communities that experienced wide-spread and intense transmission of the Ebola Virus Disease. They add that even salt cannot carry Ebola portions.</p> <p><i>*For more information or interviews, journalists/communicators can contact:</i></p> <p><b>European Commission</b> Elizabeth Lanzi Mazzocchini, Programme Manager – Education Phone: 777731761 elizabeth-mary.lanzi-mazzocchini@eeas.europa.eu</p> <p><b>Action Contre la Faim (Action Against Hunger)</b> Kentan Te'h, Food Security Program Manager fspm@lr.missions-acf.org</p> <p><b>Food Security Cluster</b> John Emmanuel Paivey, Coordinator Phone: 0770737537 johnemmanuel.paivey@fao.org</p>
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## Prevention Measures

### Bong County

Residents' rumor that health workers in Gbarnga, Bong County, are discouraging healed Ebola couples from engaging in unsafe sex because they could have an Ebola-infected newborn baby.

The Ebola virus can remain in semen for longer than previously thought, and so men who survive the disease should always use a condom during sex until more information is known, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says in a new [report](#).

Only women in their last month of pregnancy can pass on the disease to their newborn babies, according to Dr John Fankhauser of the ELWA Hospital Survivors' Clinic.

Previously, CDC and WHO recommended abstinence or condom use for at least 3 months following recovery from Ebola. However, to prevent transmission of Ebola, contact with semen from male survivors should be avoided. If male survivors have sex (oral, vaginal, or anal), a condom should be used correctly and consistently every time until further information is known. Used condoms should be handled and disposed of safely to avoid contact with semen. After handling of condoms, or following any physical contact with semen, skin should be washed thoroughly with soap and water. Based on information from this investigation, CDC, the World Health Organization, and the Government of Liberia issued updated recommendations for survivors.

*\*For more information or interviews, journalists/communicators can contact:*

#### **Center for Disease Control (CDC)**

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#### **ELWA Hospital Survivors' Clinic**

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## Routine Immunization

### Gbarpolu County

Citizens rumor that the Ebola vaccine will be given to children below five during the routine vaccination period.

### Montserrado County

Citizens rumor that the measles vaccine will infect children with Ebola instead. They also claim that some Kenyan doctors recently discovered that many of the routine vaccines will sterilize children.

The trial Ebola vaccine are only being given to adult volunteers aged 18 and above. But the routine vaccinations are given only to children below five and pregnant women. The [Liberia Immunization Platform](#) notes that:

- The routine vaccines are safe. They are the same vaccines for children that the MOH has been giving our children for many, many years.
- These vaccines will be given to all children against serious sicknesses like measles and polio.
- The vaccine and worm medicine are free and safe.
- The health workers giving the vaccines at the clinic, hospitals, and community vaccination sites will wear a new pair of gloves for each child to protect our children.

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## Routine Immunization

### Bong, Maryland, Grand Cape Mount & Sinoe Counties

Citizens rumor that the measles vaccine will infect children with Ebola.

### River Cess County

River Cess County residents rumor that the routine vaccine will weaken the immune system of their children and make them very vulnerable to another outbreak of Ebola during this year's rainy season.

### Grand Kru County

It is being rumored that health workers in Grand Kru County will vaccinate children with the Ebola vaccine and not the normal routine vaccines which they have been receiving over the years.

### River Gee County

Residents of Gbeapo, a district in River Gee County, are rumoring that the routine vaccine are not the normal ones they have been receiving over the years. They say it is the Ebola vaccine, and are discouraging parents from allowing their children to receive it.

The Liberian authorities reported that the number of children vaccinated monthly in Liberia had dropped by 60 percent at the end of 2014. Measles vaccination coverage also fell, to 58 percent, while the minimum acceptable level should be at least 80 percent to protect them against the virus. As of January, an estimated 92,000 children below one-year old in Liberia had not been vaccinated at all and are therefore today vulnerable to various preventable childhood diseases.

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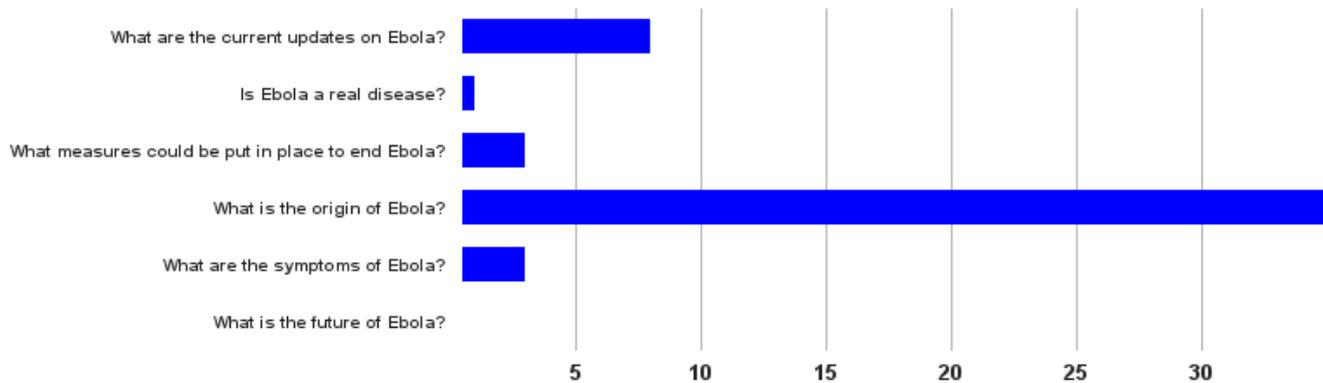
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## THE MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS IN THE GEOPOLL SURVEY

### Information Needs Analysis



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM COUNTIES

### BOMI COUNTY

- Is Ebola real?
- How can Ebola spread from one to another?

### BONG COUNTY

- In what year did Ebola enter Liberia?
- How Ebola enter Liberia?

### GRAND BASSA COUNTY

- Is Ebola still in the country?

### GRAND CAPE MOUNT

- Is Liberia free from Ebola now?

### GRAND GEDEH COUNTY

- What is Ebola?
- What are sign and symptoms of Ebola?

### MARGIBI COUNTY

- When will Liberia be declared Ebola free?
- How many days or months?
- When will Liberia be announced free from Ebola?

### MARYLAND COUNTY

- Is Ebola really a manmade virus as some people are saying?
- How did Ebola enter Liberia?

### MONTERRADO COUNTY

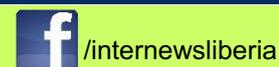
- Is Ebola Man Made?
- How did Ebola entered Liberia?

### NIMBA COUNTY

- If Ebola comes back, how can we fight the disease again?
- When Ebola was discovered and where?

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### Liberia Immunization Platform

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### ELWA Hospital Survivors' Clinic

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## Resources for the media

### **New Graduates Bring Number of Trained Mental Health Clinicians in Liberia to 144**

<http://www.cartercenter.org/news/pr/liberia-mh-030515.html>

### **The International Rescue Committee Welcomes Sierra Leone and Liberian Governments' Decision to Reopen Schools**

<http://www.rescue.org/press-releases/international-rescue-committee-welcomes-sierra-leone-liberian-governments%E2%80%99-decision-r>

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### **Ebola-hit Liberia sets out on road to recovery**

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

### **The Ebola questions**

<http://www.nature.com/news/the-ebola-questions-1.16243>

### **Health Ministry's Post-Ebola 'Transition Plan'**

<http://www.liberianobserver.com/newsdevelopment/health-ministry%E2%80%99s-post-ebola-%E2%80%98transition-plan%E2%80%99>

### **Vaccines Face Same Mistrust That Fed Ebola**

[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/14/world/africa/ebola-vaccine-researchers-fight-to-overcome-publicskepticism-in-west-africa.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/14/world/africa/ebola-vaccine-researchers-fight-to-overcome-publicskepticism-in-west-africa.html?_r=0)

### **Ebola: Pushed to the limit and beyond**

<http://www.msf.org/article/ebola-pushed-limit-and-beyond>

### **International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

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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>

### **Liberia: No vaccinations for months has put children at risk**

<http://www.msf.org/article/liberia-no-vaccinationsmonths-has-put-children-risk>

### **Vaccination must be scaled up in Ebola-affected countries**

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2015/vaccination-ebola-countries/en/>

### **Transcript for CDC Tele briefing: Measles in the United States, 2015**

<http://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2015/t0129-measles.html>

### **Why you should worry less about Ebola and more about measles**

<http://theconversation.com/why-you-should-worryless-about-ebola-and-more-about-measles-32981>

### **WHO declares Liberia Ebola-free**

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/medical-charity-declares-liberia-ebola-free-150509084225416.html>