



EBOLA – two years on: Red Cross Response

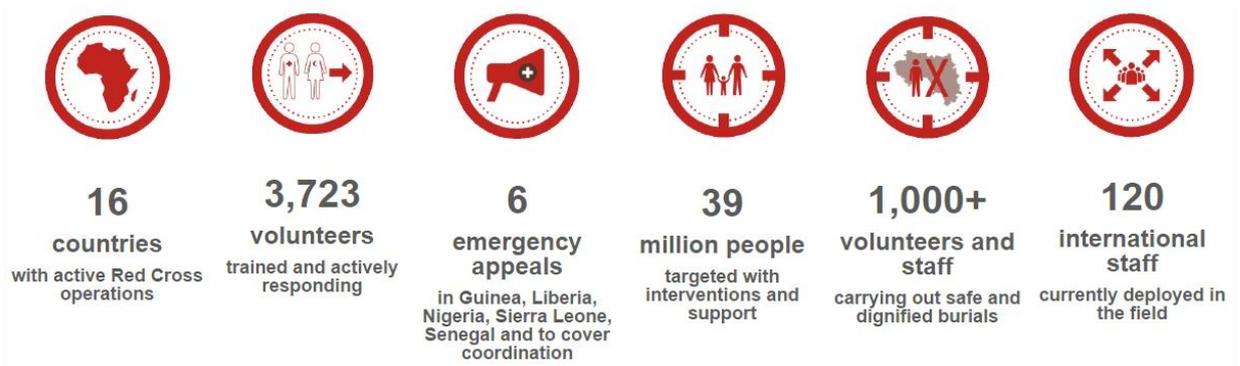
This month marks the second anniversary of the world’s most severe outbreak of Ebola in history which is traced to the infection of a two-year-old in Guinea.

The deadly virus, which was first discovered in 1976, broke out in West Africa and has claimed over 11,300 lives since the initial outbreak in December 2013.

By March 2014, the outbreak was officially notified by the World Health Organisation as the virus spread to other countries. By September, reported cases were increasing rapidly and so too the fatalities. The disease was spreading to neighbouring Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Mali.

The Red Cross was joined by other aid agencies in the field trying to halt the spread of the disease which was reaching epidemic proportions. Medical staff deployed from Europe and the US contracted the highly contagious disease and some later died.

Red Cross Operations



As 2015 progressed efforts to arrest the disease began to work. Treatments were becoming timelier and therefore more effective. Public information and education campaigns improved prevention and arrested the spread of the disease.

By the end of the year, the situation was brought under control.

Of the three countries principally affected, two have been declared Ebola-free while a third, Guinea, is currently monitoring three confirmed cases within the same family. However, the disease is incurable and therefore an outbreak could easily occur again, though vaccine trials have produced encouraging results.

Irish Red Cross Programmes

In August 2014, Irish Red Cross launched an appeal for funds which led to €65,000 being sent to support IFRC operations across the affected area.

Funds were also used to support public information and health promotion measures to help prevent the spread of the deadly virus.

This involved Irish Red Cross communications delegate Stephen Ryan working with the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and Liberian Red Cross to develop “key messaging” in affected communities, raising peoples’ understanding of the disease and how best to combat it.

As part of the process, location-targeted SMS messages on prevention, including telephone numbers for further information were circulated. Educational drama performances to sensitise local communities to the dangers of Ebola, safe burial and training for local Red Cross members were further elements of the strategy.

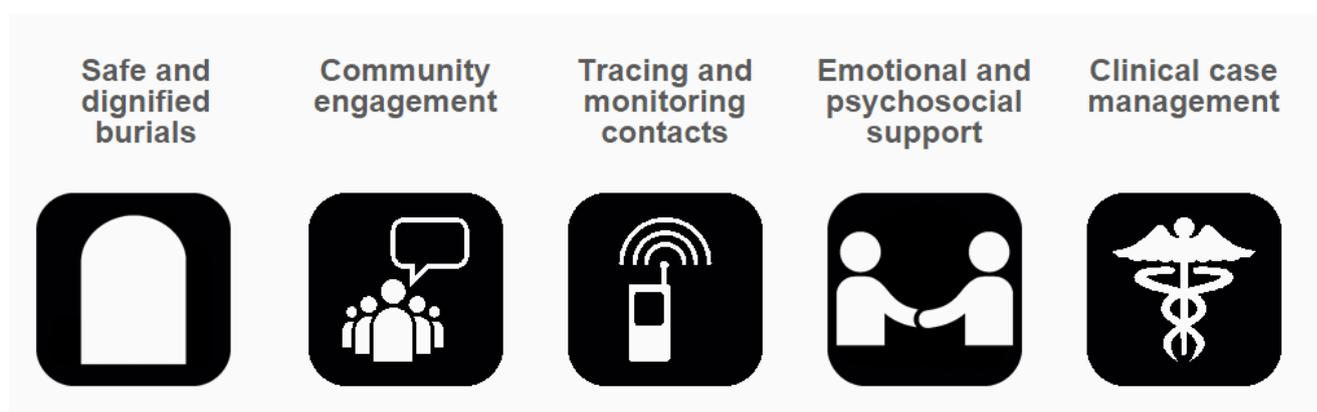
An anti-stigma campaign to address discrimination against survivors and families of victims was another important feature.

An evaluation of this work is ongoing in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, assessing how local customs and culture affect the communication outcomes during Ebola outbreaks.

This is more than good management practice, it is a crucial preventive measure which strengthens responses and interventions in the event of future outbreaks. The evaluation will provide recommendations that will also be used in public information and promotion strategies during other epidemics.

The Red Cross has been at the forefront of tackling Ebola in all affected countries, in particular Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

The Red Cross response is built around five pillars and relies on the dedicated work of international and local staff and, crucially, thousands of volunteers who are saving lives every day, helping to prevent the spread of the disease, comforting families, providing educational materials and dealing with the effects of the outbreak on the front lines.



Safe and dignified burials

The Red Cross undertakes safe and dignified burials in all Ebola-affected countries, ensuring those who died from the disease are treated with respect, while also ensuring the safety of communities. This is critical work, often performed by volunteers, and undertaken at the most dangerous time.

Community education and engagement

Red Cross supports community preparedness with educational materials, health promotion and door-to-door visits vulnerable to an outbreak. This information reaches millions.

Clinical case management

Surviving Ebola requires quick access to treatment. In Kenema, Sierra Leone, the IFRC is operating a treatment centre with 60 beds which has treated over 200 people, with over 65 being discharged.

Monitoring and contact tracing

Tracing the movements of those who have contracted the disease prevents its spread by identifying others who could be infected through contact. The extensive network of Red Cross volunteers in the three most-affected countries work with authorities to locate these vulnerable people, advise treatment and create records.

Emotional and psychosocial support

Ebola devastates families and communities and can have a negative effect on behaviours. Providing robust and culturally aware emotional support through our delegates and volunteers is a significant priority. This work also reduces the stigma and discrimination that can arise when someone is thought to be have been 'exposed' to the disease.

Country Updates

The outbreak in Mali, Nigeria and Senegal also led to the infection of people from Senegal, the UK, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, Norway and the Netherlands. In Spain and the US, two people contracted the virus in West Africa and infected other health workers in their own country. Two people died in each country as a consequence.

Country	Positive diagnoses	Fatalities	Situation Update
Guinea	14,122	3,955	Three patients remain under treatment
Liberia	10,675	4,809	Three patients remain under treatment
Sierra Leone	3,805	2,536	Disease-free http://bit.ly/1NYMLtE
Mali	8	6	Disease-free
Nigeria	20	8	Disease-free
Senegal	1	0	Disease-free
France	2	0	Disease-free
Germany	3	1	Disease-free
Netherlands	1	0	Disease-free
Norway	1	0	Disease-free
Italy	1	0	Disease-free
Spain	3	2	Disease-free
UK	3	0	One patient remains under treatment
US	11	2	Disease-free
TOTAL	28,656	11,319	

Notes: All figures as of December 01.

A country is declared disease-free when it has no cases for 42 consecutive days.

Guinea: One new confirmed case reported in the week to November 1 2015 involving a newborn child of a 25-year-old woman. The mother died after giving birth. Her other two young children were also confirmed infected the previous week and are receiving treatment. These cases involved a large number of high-risk contacts in the sub-prefecture of Forecariah. On November 1 there were 382 contacts being followed-up. Therefore there remains a near-term risk of further cases among both registered and untraced contacts remains.

Sierra Leone: On November 7 2015, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Ebola virus transmission had stopped in Sierra Leone. The country has now entered a 90-day period of enhanced surveillance, due to conclude on 5 February 2016. <http://bit.ly/1NYMLtE>

Liberia: Liberia was declared free of Ebola virus transmission on September 3 2015, and was in a 90-day period of heightened surveillance until three confirmed cases were reported in the week to 22 November. The first case was a 15-year-old boy who tested positive after admission to a health facility on 19 November. He later passed away. Two other members of the family subsequently tested positive while in isolation. Ten health care workers are among the 149 contacts identified to date.

For more on the Red Cross response to the Ebola Crisis: http://www.ifrcmedia.org/ebola/?page_id