

Ebola: Global experts begin emergency talks at WHO

06/08/2014



The meeting is expected to last two days and will decide whether to declare a global health emergency.

On Wednesday, a man suspected to have contracted Ebola died in Saudi Arabia. If confirmed, this will be the first Ebola-related death outside of Africa.

The virus has killed nearly 900 people since February in West Africa.

The outbreak began in February in Guinea, and has since spread to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

On Wednesday a nurse became the second person to die from Ebola in Nigeria.

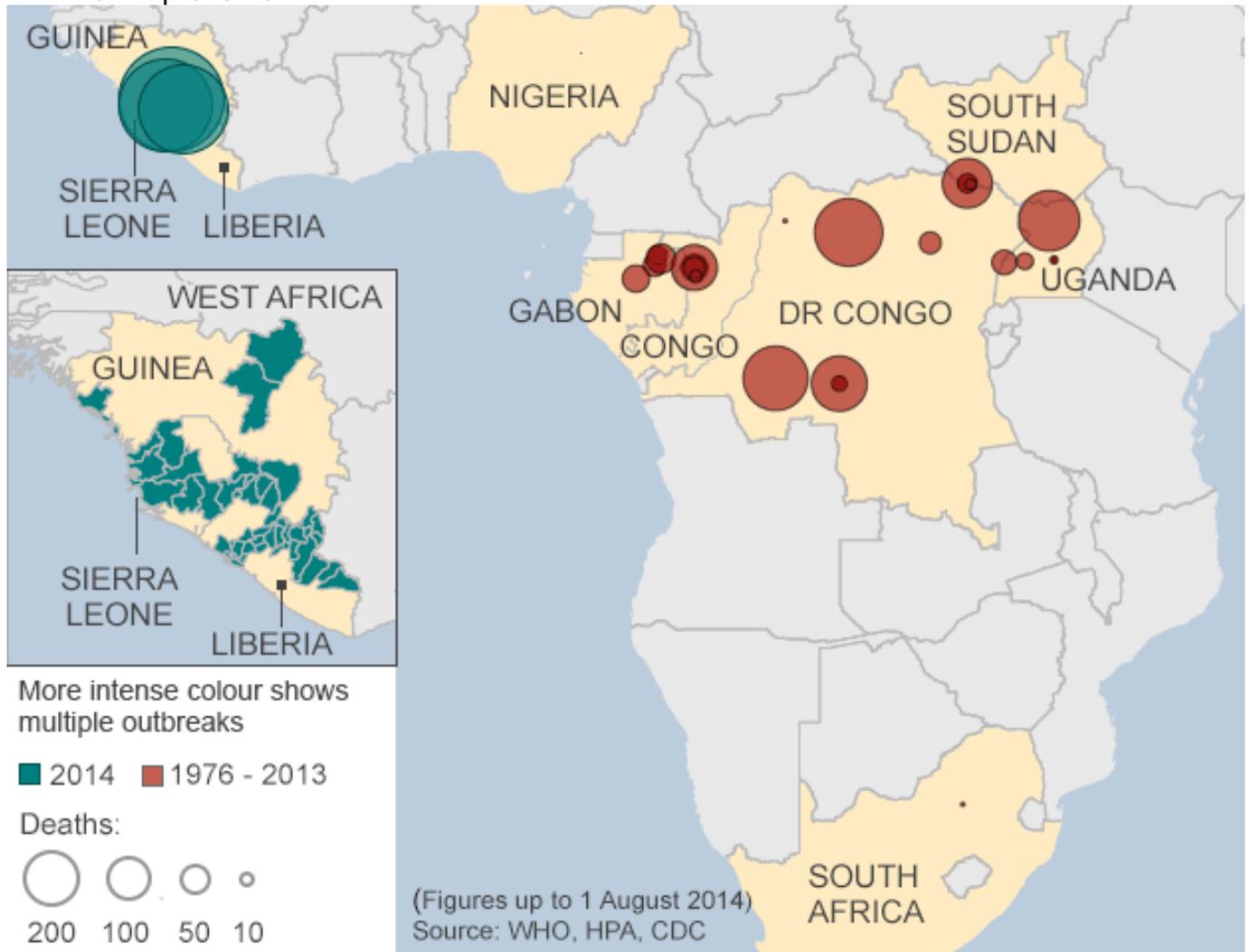
Nigeria's health minister said five other cases of Ebola were being treated in isolation in Lagos, sub-Saharan Africa's largest city.

It comes as leading infectious disease experts have called for experimental treatments to be offered more widely.

Two US aid workers who contracted Ebola in Liberia appear to be improving after receiving an unapproved medicine ahead of their evacuation back to the US.

But it is not clear if the ZMapp drug, which has only been tested on monkeys, can be credited

with their improvement.

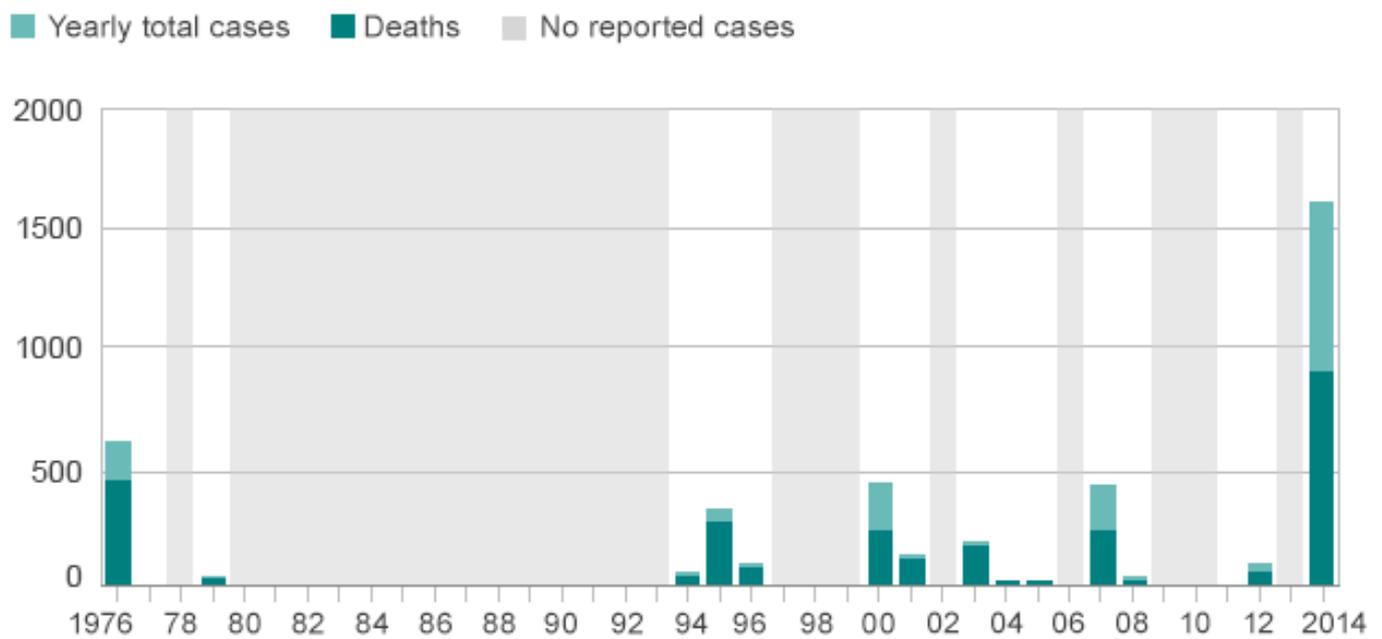


Prof Peter Piot, who co-discovered Ebola in 1976, Prof David Heymann, the head of the Centre on Global Health Security, and Wellcome Trust director Prof Jeremy Farrar said there were several drugs and vaccines being studied for possible use against Ebola.

"African governments should be allowed to make informed decisions about whether or not to use these products - for example to protect and treat healthcare workers who run especially high risks of infection," they wrote in a joint statement.

The WHO, "the only body with the necessary international authority" to allow such experimental treatments, "must take on this greater leadership role", they said.

Ebola virus outbreaks



*Figures up to 1 August 2014

Source: WHO

The meeting of the WHO's emergency committee in Geneva is focusing solely on how to respond to the Ebola outbreak.

If a public health emergency is declared it could also involve detailed plans and efforts to identify, isolate and treat cases.

It could involve imposing travel restrictions on affected areas.

A WHO spokesman said: "We can't speculate in advance what the committee members are going to decide in advance."

Meanwhile, the World Bank is allocating \$200m (£120m) in emergency assistance for countries battling to contain Ebola.

It is the world's deadliest outbreak to date and has centred on Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Eight people are currently in quarantine in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, and two have died there.

The Saudi man died after showing Ebola symptoms when he returned from a business trip to Sierra Leone, the Saudi health ministry said.

He died in an isolation ward at a hospital in Jeddah, it added.

Officials in Liberia said a Spanish priest and two Spanish nuns had been infected in the capital, Monrovia.

The Spanish government said it would send a plane to repatriate its citizens.

British Airways has temporarily suspended flights to and from Liberia and Sierra Leone until 31

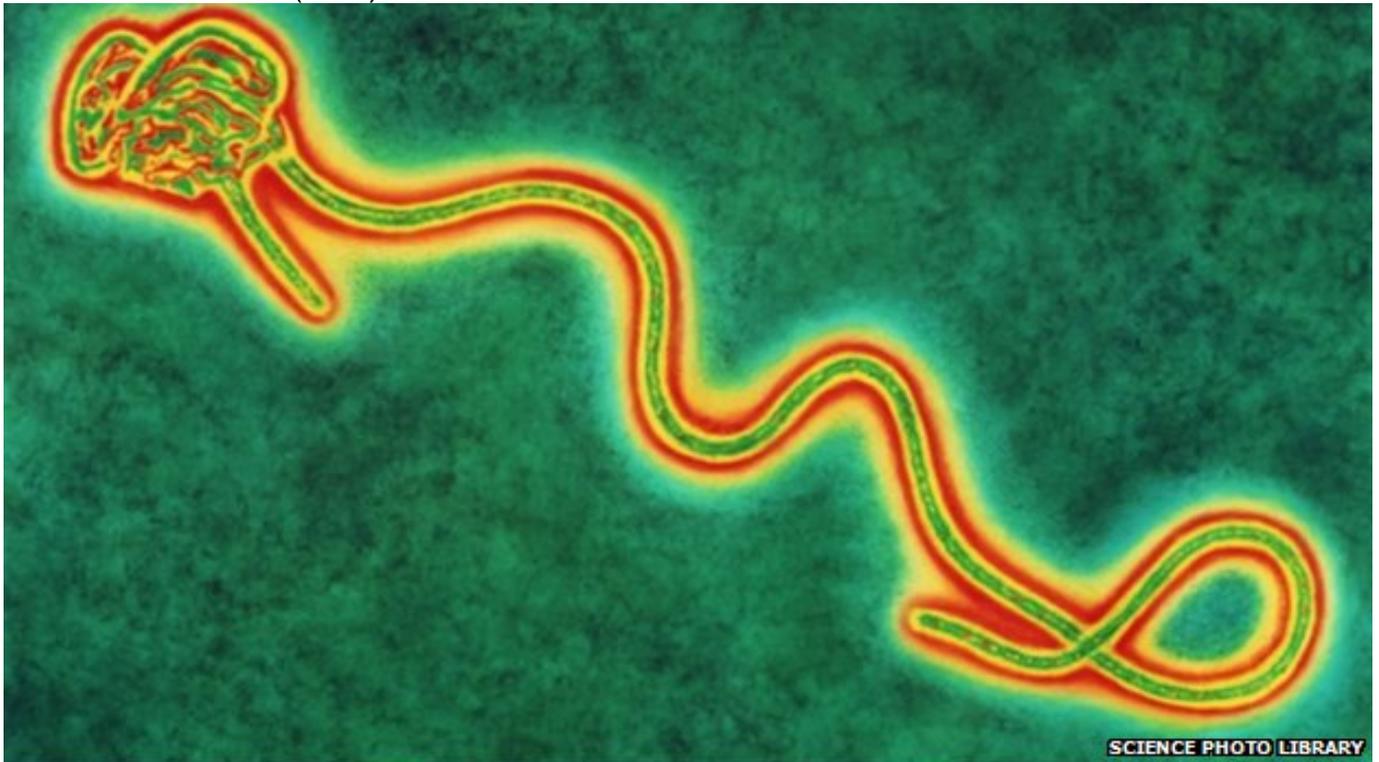
August because of the health crisis, [the airline said in a statement](#). It follows a similar suspension by two regional airlines last week.

The virus spreads by contact with infected blood and bodily fluids. The current outbreak is killing between 50% and 60% of people infected.

There is no cure or vaccine for Ebola - but patients have a better chance of survival if they receive early treatment.

Ebola has initial flu-like symptoms that can lead to external haemorrhaging from areas like eyes and gums, and internal bleeding which can lead to organ failure.

Ebola virus disease (EVD)



- Symptoms include high fever, bleeding and central nervous system damage
- Fatality rate can reach 90% - but the current outbreak is about 55%
- Incubation period is two to 21 days
- There is no vaccine or cure
- Supportive care such as rehydrating patients who have diarrhoea and vomiting can help recovery
- Fruit bats are considered to be virus' natural host

[Ebola: Experimental treatments](#)

[Why Ebola is so dangerous](#)
