



The role of the international community in current crises in the Central African Republic and northern Nigeria may be mired in confusion, but it can do something about the Ebola epidemic in west Africa.

The outbreak of the virus, which started in Guinea and has spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone, is the deadliest in recorded history, with Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaring the situation out of control.

There are more than 759 cases across 60 sites since the first ones were confirmed in March – that's almost 50 known cases per week and a 20% increase in cases since 23 June. Almost 500 people have died from the disease, which has spread across international borders.

Ebola has a fatality rate of up to 90% – once you have it, your chances of survival may be just one in 10. There is no vaccine and no cure; the only way to stop the virus is to prevent it or treat the symptoms if diagnosed early enough. It is spread by contact with the fluids of infected people or animals, such as urine, sweat and blood. During the rainy season, from June to September in west Africa, the spread of bodily fluids is a high risk.

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