

Spread of Ebola in Europe 'Unavoidable,' Says World Health Organization

More cases of the deadly Ebola virus will almost inevitably spread in Europe, but the continent is well prepared to control the disease, the World Health Organization's (WHO) regional director said on Tuesday.

Speaking to Reuters just hours after Europe's first local case of Ebola infection was confirmed in a nurse in Spain, the WHO's European director Zsuzsanna Jakab said further such events were "unavoidable."

Spanish health officials said four people have been hospitalized to try and stem any further spread of Ebola there after the nurse became the first person in the world known to have contracted the virus outside of Africa.

"Such imported cases and similar events as have happened in Spain will happen also in the future, most likely," Jakab told Reuters in a telephone interview from her Copenhagen office.

"It is quite unavoidable ... that such incidents will happen in the future because of the extensive travel both from Europe to the affected countries and the other way around," she said.

Several countries in the WHO's European region, including France, Britain, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain, have treated patients repatriated after contracting the disease in West Africa, where Ebola has spread through Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia since March, killing more than 3,400 people in the largest outbreak of the disease in history.

Jakab said European health workers tasked with caring for the patients, as well as their families and close contacts, were

most at risk of becoming infected.

“It will happen,” she said. “But the most important thing in our view is that Europe is still at low risk and that the western part of the European region particularly is the best prepared in the world to respond to viral haemorrhagic fevers including Ebola.”

Editing by Ben Hirschler

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