

From: Rebecca Baldock

5 December 07

Dear all, hope you are well and enjoying advent.

Thank you for all your prayers about the haemorrhagic fever. I'm delighted to tell you that we had no more cases and the incubation period has passed so we are all in the clear. A week ago I would have told you that that was the end of it, but I am going to ask for your prayers again. On Monday we were informed that there is an Ebola outbreak, in Bundibudgyo, two districts north of us. At present there are 72 suspected cases and 18 deaths. There have also now been two cases reported in Forte Portal, which is the district north of us.

There are many different types of Haemorrhagic fevers, but Ebola seems to be a big nasty one. In about 1998 there was an Ebola outbreak in the north of Uganda. I'm told it killed about 200 people but no one seems to be quite sure. I'm told this is only the second outbreak of Ebola in the country.

It can take about 5-7 days from contamination until people show signs of infection. Only when a person has symptoms do they become infectious. It spreads through bodily fluids, and people need to wear protective gear when in contact with these patients as skin is no barrier. Mortality rate is 50-90%. People are scarred because of the rapid mortality and its infectiousness.

One of the problems with Ebola this time and a factor in its spread (especially to health workers) is that the initial symptoms were different to the last lot of Ebola. People are presenting with fever, general body pains and diarrhoea. This is common for many diseases. We hope that now these have been recognised, health workers can protect themselves better and people will be able to be isolated sooner

I'm very impressed with how the hospital is handling it all. We have no patients as of yet, but we are prepared. There are two wards set aside. One to isolate people who definitely have the disease. The other to isolate people with suspected diseases. They have protected gear for these wards, and today we were given teaching about Ebola and how to protect ourselves.

Many of the nursing staff and community members are frightened here. They remember the outbreak in 1998, and the suddenness of death for people with the disease. Ebola's not here yet, but it's around us. One of the staff told me how it was worse than war. "With war at least you get some warning that soldiers are coming and you can hide or go away. But with Ebola if you go away, you might just be taking it with you"

We are praying that it doesn't continue to spread and that it doesn't come to Kagando. But there's almost an air of expectancy, of waiting until we get the first patient.

There is some confusion as to how long the outbreak has been there for. It is rumoured to have started in August. If that is the case then not many people have been infected within 4 months. There is talk that it was hushed up because of COGHAM. I find this hard to believe as now the government is closing all the schools in the area that have not already finished for holidays, and restricting travel to and from bundibudgyo, it's also cancelling all big functions in the area.

The information I am getting is quite mixed. I'm not too worried at the moment, but other people are. Please join with us in praying that the outbreak will stop and that Kagando will not be affected.

Thank you  
Rebecca