

Ebola survivors face increased risk of death



A worker from the World Health Organization (WHO) prepares to administer Ebola vaccination during the launch of an experimental vaccine in Mbandaka, north-western Democratic Republic of the Congo, on May 21, 2018. File Photo by EPA-EFE/STR

The overall death rate of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa may have been underestimated, with new research finding survivors could have a five times higher death rate after leaving the hospital than the general population.

An outbreak of Ebola is currently raging in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where more than 3,000 cases of the viral disease have occurred over the past year, including more than 2,000 deaths.

The new study focuses on 1,130 Guinean survivors of the 2013-2016 Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the largest such outbreak ever recorded. These patients

were tracked from early December 2015 to the end of September 2016. During that time, 59 died in the first year after hospital discharge.

That 5.2 percent death rate was five times higher than what would be expected in the general Guinean population, according to the study. It was published Sept. 4 in *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* journal.

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“Our findings highlight the need to strengthen Ebola survivor programs, particularly as the number of people surviving the infection are increasing,” study author Dr. Ibrahima Soce Fall said in a journal news release.

Fall is the World Health Organization’s assistant director-general for emergency response.

Of the 59 deaths, 37 were initially attributed to kidney failure based on symptoms reported by family members.

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There was a lack of documentation or autopsies available to rule out other causes of death, according to the study authors. They called for more research to determine if kidney failure is a common long-term effect of Ebola in survivors.

Fall and his colleagues also said their study confirms that Ebola survivors’ health is highly vulnerable, particularly among those who had prolonged forms of the disease. They said the research suggests that the reported overall death rate for Ebola may have been low.

One of the researchers, Judith Glynn, said the results could “help to guide current and future survivors’ programs and the prioritization of funds in resource-constrained settings.”

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For example, “those hospitalized with Ebola for longer may be at greater risk, and could be specifically targeted,” added Glynn, a professor at London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in England.

More information

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on Ebola.

Source:

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