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Russia Offers to Send More Experts to Tackle Ebola in West Africa

By The Moscow Times

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A World Health Organization (WHO) health worker (L) teaches a trainee health worker how to put on a protective suit in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Russia's health and safety watchdog has said it ready to send additional experts to West Africa to help contain the Ebola outbreak that has killed more than 3,400 people, if its medical personnels' safety can be guaranteed.

Watchdog head Anna Popova said Tuesday that her agency, Rospotrebnadzor, "would be willing to consider sending specialists and laboratories to West Africa in line with the UN's coordinating role [in combating the virus] and on the condition that the safety of personnel could be guaranteed," according to a statement on the agency website.

The statement, which detailed a meeting between Popova and the UN's system coordinator for Ebola, David Nabarro, did not specify which guarantees Russia may be seeking after a number of health workers have contracted the virus despite extensive safety precautions.

In the first known case of infection with the virus outside of Africa, a nurse's assistant in Spain was this week diagnosed with Ebola after caring for two Spanish missionaries in Madrid, where they were flown for treatment after contacting the virus in West Africa.

Both missionaries have since died, and health professionals in Spain have blamed substandard equipment and a failure to follow safety protocols for the nurse's contracting the virus.

Following the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa, Russia in August sent a group of specialists to Guinea, and the statement released Tuesday attested to the UN's appreciation of Russia's role in helping to address the crisis.

"In particular, the UN greatly appreciates the help provided by Russia to Guinea in the form of the mobile laboratory and specialists ... who have been taking part in providing anti-epidemic measures and diagnosing the Ebola virus in Guinea," the statement read.

A total of 15 suspected Ebola cases have been reported in Russia, but all the people have tested negative for the virus, Popova has said, the Interfax news agency reported.

Russia also continues to monitor 220 students from West Africa who have arrived since the start of this month, while another 337 students have tested negative for the virus and are no longer under observation, Popova was quoted as saying.

All of the students are asymptomatic and none have been isolated, but doctors are checking their temperature and other health signs, she added.

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