

WHO reports West Africa healthcare strained by Ebola and COVID outbreaks

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WHO data shows that West Africa in the past month recorded the highest number of COVID-19 deaths since the pandemic began [File: Sunday Alamba/AP Photo]

Geneva, August 20 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization has warned that on top of the COVID-19 pandemic, West Africa is facing new outbreaks of the viral haemorrhagic fevers Marburg and Ebola,

risking huge strains on ill-equipped health systems.

The new outbreaks show the multitude of challenges governments are fighting in parallel with the pandemic, Matshidiso Moeti, WHO regional director for Africa, told a news conference on Thursday.

“We are particularly concerned about West Africa,” Moeti said. “Fighting multiple outbreaks is a complex challenge.” Ivory Coast began vaccinating health workers against Ebola in the commercial capital Abidjan on Monday after a case of the deadly virus was confirmed over the weekend.

The country on Saturday declared its first case of Ebola since 1994. Authorities said it was an isolated case of an 18-year-old girl who travelled from neighbouring Guinea. Last week, health authorities in Guinea confirmed one death from Marburg, which is similar to Ebola. Africa faces more infectious disease outbreaks every year than any other region, Moeti said.

Health systems in West Africa in particular are weaker than in other parts of the continent, she added, although the WHO did not give any specific numbers regarding staffing levels or hospital bed occupancy rates across the region.

Meanwhile, WHO data shows that West Africa in the past month recorded the highest number of COVID-19 deaths since the pandemic began, and cases are surging in Ivory Coast, Guinea and Nigeria – all three of which have recently been hit with other outbreaks.

Separately, Ivory Coast has identified an outbreak of the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian flu near the commercial capital Abidjan and has taken steps to curb its spread, the government said on Thursday.

“Facing three outbreaks at the same time, for any health system, it’s a very difficult situation,” Mamadou Samba, Ivory Coast’s director general of health, told the same news conference.

Samba did not respond directly to a question about how many of the many dozens of people who rode on a bus with the girl who travelled to Ivory Coast from neighbouring Guinea had been identified.

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