

Ebola Response in Sierra Leone



CDC Ebola Response Infection Prevention and Control Team member Hassan Benya demonstrating proper use of personal protective equipment to staff in a rural clinic in Tonkolili, Sierra Leone, 2015.

Sierra Leone was one of the three countries hardest hit by the 2014 Ebola outbreak. The severity of the outbreak highlighted the need for immediate international response to save lives and stop the spread to the United States and other countries.

To assist with the crisis in Sierra Leone, CDC deployed a team from its International Infection Control Program out of the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases, Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion.

CDC was on the front lines of the Ebola response, providing technical guidance and on-the-ground infection prevention and control (IPC) training. Without IPC, healthcare facilities can amplify and speed the spread of infection, undermining critical healthcare infrastructure needed to control the outbreak. Before 2014, Sierra Leone's IPC capacity was extremely limited and as a result, healthcare facilities became dangerous places where Ebola was transmitted to patients and to healthcare personnel. Communities lost confidence in their facilities and as a result, the country's healthcare system began to collapse.

The International Infection Control Program focused on stopping the outbreak and rebuilding the country's healthcare system by:

- Making healthcare facilities safer by training healthcare personnel in infection control principles, and implementing essential safeguard systems.
- Ensuring national ownership of IPC capacity by working with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to adapt and promote IPC policies and guidelines for Sierra Leone.

Key activities and achievements of IICP's response in Sierra Leone include:

- Creation of National IPC Policy and National IPC Technical Guidelines to establish and communicate IPC standards across Sierra Leone.
- Development of the 2016-2019 National IPC Action Plan to set priorities for the next three years.

- Piloting a Quality Improvement course with four government hospitals to analyze and improve performance at each facility.
- Training of more than 50 Ministry of Health and Sanitation district IPC staff to conduct IPC response activities.

Looking ahead, NCEZID will continue to work with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in Sierra Leone to train nurses in IPC and providing pre-service IPC education in nursing, medical, and allied health schools to expand the IPC workforce in Sierra Leone.

