

Ebola: Then and Now

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The daily countdown to zero Ebola in the Ministry of Health data centre, Monrovia, Liberia

THEN

“In the last week of September 2014, more than 900 Ebola cases were reported from West Africa. There were probably more. There weren’t enough hospital beds, and two thirds of patients were dying.

We had no way of knowing how much bigger the epidemic would get. Working with uncertain numbers, our challenge was to convey the impending risk to the world, without exaggeration but to stimulate the right action.

At that point, even one more month of epidemic growth would have generated thousands of cases per week. Luckily it didn’t happen – the opening of laboratories and treatment centres, the widespread adoption of safe burial practices, and the changing behaviour of affected populations all helped to reverse the epidemic.”

NOW

“We have had no new cases since 29 October 2015. Now in the second week of November, we are tracking just a single known chain of transmission in Guinea. The people in contact with the last case, who might be infected, have almost completed their 21-day follow-up.

In the long tail of this Ebola outbreak, with fewer cases and a lot more experience, almost all aspects of data collection and analysis are better than they were one year ago.

However, we still face a big challenge in turning information into action on the ground. One key factor is that, even after 18 months of Ebola, public health experts and people in the affected communities still don’t hold a common view of this disease and how to control it. Working to create that shared understanding is vital to ending this epidemic.”



World Health Organization