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Experts fight Ebola Gabonese town struck by deadly disease

GENEVA (AP) — International health experts forced to pull out of a remote Gabonese town struck by Ebola met Friday with local officials to discuss security and how to resume their work to keep the disease from spreading.

The 17-member international team and Gabonese health ministry officials left the jungle town of Mekambo on Tuesday because of threats from residents. The outbreak has so far killed 25 people.

Tension has been high in Mekambo and surrounding villages, where many blame outsiders for the difficulties they have had since the outbreak began in Gabon and neighboring Republic of Congo. Rumors are rife that witchcraft and vampires rather than Ebola have caused the deaths.

Efforts by the international team to halt traditional burial practices — such as washing corpses, which increases the risk of spreading the virus — also fed local hostility.

"It can be a question of suspending usual practices — or dying," World Health Organization spokesman Gregory Hartl said. "It comes down to that."

Hartl said a representative of the U.N. health agency, the aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres and the Gabonese health ministry met Friday in Mekambo, 465 miles northeast of the Gabonese capital, Libreville, to discuss security.

The international Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said an international team could return as early as Saturday, but Hartl said no decision has yet been made.

"If the physical safety of all the team mem-

bers isn't adequate, then we can't ensure proper support for the people of Mekambo," he said.

Local Red Cross volunteers have succeeded in dispelling some of the mistrust of outsiders, the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said in its statement Friday.

Ebola is one of the most deadly viral diseases, killing between 50 percent and 90 percent of those who contract it. It spreads through bodily fluids and attacks internal organs, causing bloody diarrhea and vomiting. With-

"If the physical safety of all the team members isn't adequate, then we can't ensure proper support for the people of Mekambo."

— Gregory Hartl
 WHO spokesman

weeks, the victim usually dies from massive blood loss.

Hartl said WHO was worried about being unable to monitor the more than 200 people who had been in contact with Ebola sufferers. Daily surveillance for symptoms is vital to containing the disease.

So far, 21 cases and 18 fatalities have been confirmed in Gabon and 13 cases and 10 fatalities in the Republic of Congo. More experts were investigating an additional 16 suspected cases in Gabon.

Napster to re-launch Website

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Attempting to resurrect the Internet file-swapping service, Napster officials say they're just weeks away from relaunching for paying subscribers.

The company that revolutionized music distribution — only to get slammed and crippled by music industry lawsuits — is still not offering music from major labels, however.

On Thursday, Napster launched six weeks of testing by 20,000 volunteers in the United States.

Using improved file identification technology, Napster can now weed out unauthorized tunes and concentrate on providing paying customers music the company has the rights to traffic, said chief executive Konrad Hilbers.

In a telephone interview, Hilbers could offer neither an official launch date nor a set price for the service, though he said he was looking to offer 50 downloads per month for a price in the range of \$5 to \$10.

"The momentum that Napster created was definitely also in part driven by the depth of content that was available," Hilbers said. "We currently think that we are so close to getting all major label content."

The new Napster has a similar look and feel to the old, with a few visual improvements including a free-floating software player that can be dragged around the screen.

Instead of trading unprotected MP3s of popular music as before, users of the new Napster will be swapping .nap files, playable only on the desktop of the computer on which the software is installed.

Some unprotected MP3 files also will be available, though they'll likely come from small bands looking to make a name for themselves by distributing their music for free, said Shawn Fanning, who created Napster in 1999 during his freshman year at Northeastern University.

After becoming a bazaar for the free exchange of copyright

music, Napster was hit by music industry lawsuits that forced it offline by a federal judge. The recording industry sued Napster in 1999, alleging copyright infringement.

Napster has made offers to settle the suit, but the litigation is still pending in the District Court in San Francisco and the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

wooing new and former users to the paid service as Napster's greatest challenge and the Redwood City-based company now has competitors chiefly from two industry-backed ventures.

MusicNet is the joint venture of RealNetworks and the EMI and Warner record labels. Pressplay offers content from Sony and Universal and EMI.

Both services launched last month, but neither was able to attract as many subscribers as has attracted Bertelsmann AG, the parent company of BMG, is Napster's primary financial backer.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Health officials renew warning of alfalfa sprouts

ATLANTA (AP) — Federal health officials Thursday renewed warnings about the raw alfalfa sprouts often served on salads, saying they can be contaminated with salmonella or E. coli bacteria.

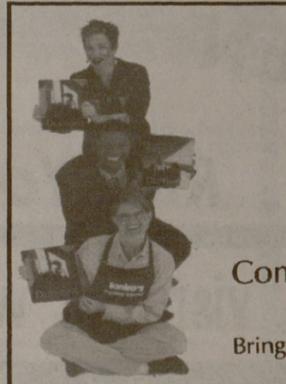
The sprouts should be thoroughly cooked to kill the bacteria, and some people should stay away altogether, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said.

The new warning came after a CDC investigation of a salmonella outbreak that sickened 32 people last year in California, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico.

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