

Thousands of Liberians in 'post-Ebola syndrome' study

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Liberia launched a five-year study on Wednesday to unravel the mystery of the long-term health effects that plague Ebola survivors and assess how long they should go without sex.

The Partnership for Research on Ebola Vaccines in Liberia, a collaboration with the United States more commonly known by the acronym PREVAIL, is expected to enrol 1,500 [survivors](#) and 6,000 of their partners and family across the west African country.

"The clinical course of Ebola virus disease is reasonably well-understood, but we still have much to learn about the long-term health effects of the illness in those who recover," Anthony Fauci, of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) said in a statement.

The epidemic killed more than 4,800 Liberians after spreading from Guinea in March last year but the country was given the all-clear on May 9—42 days after the last case was buried.

There has been little research on survivors, but the World Health Organization (WHO) has acknowledged that many are experiencing crippling complications long after walking out of Ebola treatment units (ETUs).

Matshidiso Moeti, the WHO's head in Africa, told AFP in April Liberian survivors had been reporting a range of problems, including sight and hearing impairment, as part of a mystery condition referred to

as "post-Ebola syndrome".

Investigators from the NIH's National Eye Institute (NEI), the John F Kennedy hospital in Monrovia and the Liberian government will collaborate on the research.

'Many health complaints'

"We have realised that many survivors have come from the ETU complaining about health complications, but these complaints have not been documented and that seems like we are not concerned," Kasola Fallah, the study's chief researcher, told AFP in Monrovia.

The WHO announced in April that traces of Ebola had been found in the semen of a man six months after his recovery, recommending that survivors use condoms beyond the three-month period previously prescribed.

"It became apparent that lots of things about Ebola survivors have not been studied... That started to raise lots of questions about the disease," Fallah said.

All participants will undergo a medical history and physical and vision examination and have blood collected, while some will be asked to provide samples of sweat, tears, semen or cervical secretions.

Enrolment began with six survivors at the JFK on Wednesday, with sites across the country due to be added in the future.

"I am a survivor. Since I left the ETU I have been experiencing lots of health complaints," Luke Tarplah told AFP.

"Right now my head is strongly hurting. Sometimes it is my entire body.

I am happy to be part of this study to know what are the reasons."Z

Participants will be asked to volunteer the names of up to five close contacts—family or sexual partners—who will also undergo examinations and blood tests before completing questionnaires detailing their contact with the survivor.

The research team will follow the Ebola survivors and their close contacts for up to five years, examining them and tracking [health](#) issues every six months.

In February, PREVAIL launched a clinical trial in Liberia on two experimental Ebola vaccines involving 1,500 participants which is ongoing.

The partnership is also working on trials on treatments in Liberia, Sierra Leone and the United States.

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