

As Schools Reopen in Guinea, UNICEF Helps Reduce Risk of Ebola Transmission

NEW YORK (January 20, 2015) – As schools reopen in Guinea, UNICEF and partners are helping reduce as much as possible the risk of Ebola transmission, training teachers to implement safety measures such as daily temperature screening, and supplying thermometers and hand-washing kits for schools.

“The closure of schools has had a profound impact in a region with some of the lowest educational indicators in the world, and among children whose world has been turned upside down by Ebola,” said Dr. Peter Salama, UNICEF’s Global Emergency Coordinator for Ebola. “As schools reopen, it is critical that they be a protective environment where the risk of transmission of Ebola is reduced to a minimum, and knowledge contributes to halting the spread of the virus.”

Because of Ebola, public schools in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone remained closed after the July-August break, depriving 5 million children of months of school education.

Public schools in Guinea officially reopened this week. In Liberia and Sierra Leone, UNICEF is also working with governments and communities to prepare for the eventual school reopening.

Safety protocols developed by the ministries of education, together with UNICEF and partners, include screening at the school entrance, and not allowing on the premises anyone who has a fever over 38° C, who had contact with a patient or a victim of Ebola in the past 21 days or who has three symptoms of Ebola—such as fever, diarrhea and vomiting. The protocols also spell out how to handle a suspected case through a referral system with the nearest health clinic.

Teachers have an important role to play in spreading information while schools are closed, and in supporting their safety when they reopen. UNICEF trained thousands of teachers to participate in social mobilization campaigns to help equip children, parents, teachers and other community members with the knowledge they need to protect themselves from Ebola and prevent further transmission of the virus.

UNICEF and partners have also provided schools with thousands of hygiene kits, which include soap and buckets. And because schools in the affected countries often do not have access to safe water, UNICEF is helping mobilize parents and other community members to deliver water to schools.

In Liberia and Sierra Leone, UNICEF is supporting authorities in expanding radio education programs so that children don’t miss out entirely on their education as schools remain closed. To address the lack of radios and unreliable electricity, UNICEF has ordered the first 17,000 of 50,000 solar-powered radios that will be distributed to the most vulnerable households, and is working with education partners to distribute pre-recorded lessons in the hardest to reach areas.

Even after schools reopen, the radio programs—which include subjects such as mathematics, social studies and science—will continue to play an important educational role, including in efforts to reach out-of-school children. Prior to the crisis, school attendance in primary education was 58 percent in Guinea, 34 percent in Liberia and 74 percent in Sierra Leone.

To view photos and video from Ebola-affected countries, please visit <http://uni.cf/1xZAb39>

###

About UNICEF

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) works in more than 190 countries and territories to put children first. UNICEF has helped save more children’s lives than any other humanitarian organization, by providing health care and immunizations, clean water and sanitation, nutrition, education, emergency relief and more. The U.S. Fund for UNICEF supports UNICEF’s work through fundraising, advocacy and education in the United States. Together, we are working toward the day when no children die from

preventable causes and every child has a safe and healthy childhood. For more information, visit www.unicefusa.org.

For more information, contact:

Susannah Masur, U.S. Fund for UNICEF, 212.880.9146, smasur@unicefusa.org