The deadly Ebola virus is currently spreading across West Africa, with cases registered in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The virus is transmitted through direct contact with the blood, body fluids or tissue of infected animals or people. Several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Japan are currently working on vaccines.

Joining the global fight against the outbreak of Ebola virus disease, Russia has over the past few months been issuing a highly overwhelming response. On its website, the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry has said they were convinced that Russia's active participation in international collective efforts would make a noticeable contribution to the elimination of the outbreak of this dangerous disease.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also told reporters that Russia was ready to send more highly qualified experts to assist in the fight against the epidemic in Africa. ‘Russia will make an active contribution to the efforts of the world community,’ Lavrov noted, speaking on the sidelines of the recent UN General Assembly meeting in New York.

He outlined Russia's task for effective participation in global efforts. Ebola virus is a problem that should bring all countries together, Lavrov said. The UN Security Council has called the Ebola outbreak a threat to international peace and security.

Recognising the health crisis and its rising humanitarian aspects and possible negative impact on the economy, Russia has joined global efforts to fight the epidemic by partnering with the United Nations, other international organisations and the governments of affected countries (Congo, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Senegal), where the epidemic is reportedly getting worse on daily basis.

The key goals of the Russian government is to help with clinical research to identify the original cause of the disease; monitoring; advocating for adherence to rigorous procedures of infection control; and providing useful information and educating the African and Russian public, as well as the broader global audience, about the prevention and control of the disease.

The Russian Federation has already offered an immense amount humanitarian assistance, and has despatched medical groups to the affected countries. Specialists from the Federal Service for Supervision of Consumer Rights Protection and Human Well-Being, or Rospotrebnadzor, are continuing their work in Guinea fighting the lethal Ebola disease, the watchdog reported on its website.

Buziness Africa magazine has confirmed that Russia, indeed, has dispatched a mobile laboratory to Guinea. The laboratory has equipment to diagnose Ebola and other dangerous infectious diseases. The team of specialists working within the laboratory continues to work on diagnostic aids and the participation in anti-epidemic measures in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Public Hygiene of the Republic of Guinea, the statement says.

In September, Rospotrebnadzor sent a cargo container with personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, etc) from Saratov (about 900km from Moscow) for healthcare workers battling the Ebola virus in Guinea, according to the agency's chief, Anna Popova.

Russian scientists are already experienced in diagnosing the Ebola virus, and a Russian anti-epidemic team, which includes epidemiologists, virologists and bacteriologists from Rospotrebnadzor, is currently stationed in Guinea.

‘We have been able to verify the effectiveness of our diagnostic kits,’ Popova said. ‘As of today, we have three Russian-produced diagnostic systems; these are the only ones we are working with (in Guinea). The Central Research Institute of Epidemiology has developed a kit for Ebola diagnosis. It works very effectively and is being registered in Russia. With these testing systems, we are ready to
assist our colleagues in other laboratories and other countries.'

While attending the International Investment Forum Sochi, Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets also told reporters, 'Russian doctors are working successfully in the area of Ebola outbreak in West Africa. Positive steps were made to develop a vaccine. Now, it is passing systematic tests.'

After a roundtable conference hosted by the All-Russia People’s Front in early September, Minister of Healthcare Veronika Skvortsova told the Itar-Tass news agency that a Russian vaccine for Ebola virus passed successful tests. ‘We've gotten a vaccine that has passed a very successful pre-clinical testing and now we're awaiting certification by the World Health Organisation but we're ready to use the vaccine in principle. We'll use it wherever our assistance is needed,’ she said, adding that the Russian vaccine could be used in the way that the Americans had already used their experimental vaccine.

In addition to these measures, Russian Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Dmitry Maksimychev, has stated that, ‘Russia will provide food aid to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, which have been hit the hardest by the Ebola.’ He said over $1million worth of aid is to be provided. ‘Russia has actively joined in the efforts to provide financial and technical support to the affected countries on both a multilateral and bilateral basis,’ said he stated.

‘Considering more extensive consequences of the epidemic, including the food security threat, Russia, in cooperation with the World Food Program, is preparing food assistance in the amount of more than $1million to the three most affected countries,’ he added.

Russia would also make a contribution of $2.5million to the 2014-2015 budget of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to facilitate the introduction of international medical and sanitary rules as the basis for global response to threats similar to Ebola virus disease. In addition, Russia will provide $4million in direct technical assistance to countries that need help in introducing these rules. Another $3.5million will be contributed to the WHO for improving its emergency response capabilities.

Russia has provided funding for the purchase and supply of medical modules, medicines and disposables for 60,000 people in countries most affected by the Ebola outbreak, Maksimychev said, noting that one such module will be delivered to Benin shortly. Russia has set up a specialised epidemiological team which is working in Guinea in cooperation with the WHO and Doctors Without Borders to help the country’s Health Ministry deal with the problem.

More Russian medics and volunteers will be sent to Guinea. He also referenced the Russian-created vaccine currently awaiting certification from the WHO. Expecting the vaccine's approval, he said, “After that, we will be prepared to use it if need be.’ Russia is also ready to supply its own high-sensitivity testing systems to the region.

Russia has shown its preparedness to control the export of the virus to its territory. Despite the tragic epidemic in West Africa, Russia's health experts and other authorities have agreed it is highly unlikely that there would be an Ebola outbreak in Russia. Nevertheless, Russia continues to take extra, effective measures to prevent the unintentional importation of cases into the country. ‘There are no threats for Russians. We have several barriers of protection,’ stated Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets.

Russia's Federal Medico-Biological Agency has set up a specialised evacuation service ready to throw its shoulder into the worldwide effort to curb the Ebola virus disease. The agency held a meeting covering the steps required to prevent outbreaks of particularly contagious infections on the territory of Russia.

Rospotrebnadzor warns that the epidemic situation remains tense in West Africa—especially in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Senegal. Both the Federal Agency for Tourism (Rostourism) and Rospotrebnadzor recommend Russian citizens not to travel to the epidemic zone, and remind tour operators and travel agencies that they must inform clients about the situation in West Africa.
The Russian Health Ministry continues to monitor the condition of students who have returned from Ebola-stricken countries. All these students are watched for 21 days to determine if any have symptoms of the virus. All passengers using direct and connecting flights from West and Central Africa have their temperature taken remotely.

The Presidential Special Envoy to Africa and Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Federation Council, Upper House of Russian Parliament, Mikhail Margelov, called for more active cooperation with African countries following the Ebola outbreak in West Africa. ‘The epidemic is not only carrying the threat of death but it is also increasing tension in the region with the healthcare systems of the affected countries having to cope with the enormous workload, borders getting closed, civil planes being grounded and people panicking,’ he said.

Nick Golding, a researcher at Oxford University's Department of Zoology, recently used a new model devised by the university to identify 15 countries in Africa that are at risk of animal-to-human transmissions of the deadly Ebola virus due to their geographic location. The model traces the previously nonexistent Ebola virus found in West Africa to fruit bats, capable of spreading the disease to other animals and humans. The migratory activities of birds and human hunting practices put people who prepare and consume infected animals at risk. The current at-risk countries include Nigeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola, Togo, the United Republic of Tanzania, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Burundi, Equatorial Guinea, Madagascar and Malawi.

The US Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says the number of cases has been significantly underreported. The CDC also believes the number of Ebola cases in West Africa may reach 1.4million by January if no urgent measures to contain the deadly outbreak are taken. The outbreak has already claimed over 2,800 lives in West Africa, according to the latest WHO estimates. A total of 5,293 Ebola cases were reported in Liberia, Guinea, Sierra-Leone, Nigeria and Senegal since the beginning of the current outbreak.

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Russia has provided funding for the purchase and supply of medical modules, medicines and disposables for 60,000 people in countries most affected by the Ebola outbreak. More medics and volunteers are expected to go to West Africa in the coming days.

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