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CENTRE FOR
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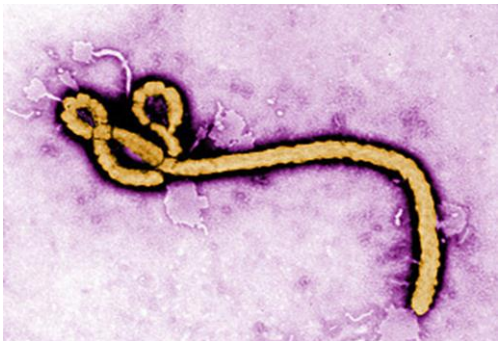
MONITORING EBOLA CASES IN REAL-TIME

THE HZI COORDINATES A PROJECT FOR FIGHTING THE EBOLA EPIDEMIC IN WEST AFRICA

The current *Ebola epidemic* has shown how quickly a virus outbreak can turn into a global health crisis. To support of the fight against this *epidemic*, the German Centre for Infection Research (DZIF) just initiated the "EBOKON" consortium, which aims to promote *Ebola* research and close gaps in our knowledge as quickly as possible. EBOKON is funded with 2.3 million Euros by the German Ministry of Education and Resarch (BMBF) and runs until the end of 2015. The Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) in Braunschweig contributes one project to this cause.



"It is important to bundle our expertise in *infection* research in order to successfully control this *epidemic*," says Prof Dirk Heinz, who is Scientific Director of the HZI and member of the board of DZIF. "We want to find comprehensive ways that allow us to address knowledge gaps and enable us to prevent future outbreaks of this kind." A total of ten EBOKON projects will be undertaken in the upcoming 14 months. They range from the research on new vaccines and the analysis of the *infection* process to studies investigating the spread of the disease.

Within the consortium with its project EBOKON 10 the HZI follows the ambitious goal to not only better control future but even the current *Ebola* outbreak. "Next to early diagnosis and isolation the most effective measure to contain an *Ebola* outbreak is the immediate identification and care of persons who had close contact with an *Ebola* patient," says Prof Gérard Krause, who is project leader and head of the Department of *Epidemiology* at the HZI. However, due to the vast scope of the current outbreak and the nature of the disease, recording of cases suspected of *infection* and exposed individuals requires highly sophisticated technology.

"We are developing a new system, in which mobile phones that are centrally linked to each other are used as a management tools in order to assure infections control measures without delay, " says Krause. “We can assess contact persons in real time and provide support.” Two other scientific partners from Germany contribute to the project, the Robert Koch-Institute and the Bernhard-Nocht-Institute. A very promising detail is that software company SAP and the Hasso-Plattner-Institute offered to support the technological aspects involved in the development of this sophisticated IT system.

The high performance data management system SAP HANA will assure flexible and rapid processing of complex data while for the application in the field common cell phones can be used without further configurations or installation. This approach therefore addresses the particular technical infrastructure and needs found in West African countries.

"A special aspect of the project is the direct integration of Nigerian partners. This ensures a successful implementation that meets local requirements," says Krause. And Dr. Akin Oyemakinde, Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) adds: “The NCDC is in support of this technical innovation and its application to disease surveillance and response” As is true of all other measures, rapid implementation is key in this project. The pilot phase is scheduled for as early as April.

"We are very hopeful that the work in the consortium will contribute to a rapid and sustainable solution to the crisis," says Prof Heinz.

Further information about the project and recent results are available at the website **www.helmholtz-hzi.de/ebokon10**

The **Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI)** contributes to the achievement of the goals of the Helmholtz Association of German Research Centres and to the successful implementation of the research strategy of the German Federal Government. The goal is to meet the challenges in infection research and make a contribution to public health with new strategies for the prevention and therapy of infectious diseases. **www.helmholtz-hzi.de**

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