



A nurse wears protective clothing as he demonstrates the facilities in place at the Royal Free Hospital in north London on Wednesday, in preparation for a patient testing positive for Ebola.

Ebola deaths nearing 1,000

> Liberia declares state of emergency, Sierra Leone sends troops to hospitals

MADRID: A fast-spreading Ebola epidemic sparked states of emergency in overwhelmed west African nations yesterday as the death toll neared 1,000 and an elderly Spanish missionary was evacuated for treatment at home.

In Liberia, where the dead lay in the streets, lawmakers gathered to ratify a state of emergency while Sierra Leone sent troops to guard hospitals and clinics handling Ebola cases. Nigeria held out hope it could receive an experimental US-developed drug to halt the spread of the virus.

Since breaking out earlier this year, the epidemic has claimed 932 lives and infected more than 1,700 people across west Africa, according to the World Health Organisation.

Ebola causes severe fever and, in the worst cases, unstoppable bleeding. It is transmitted through close contact with bodily fluids, and people who live with or care for patients are most at risk.

As African nations struggled with the sheer scale of the epidemic, Spain flew home a 75-year-old Roman Catholic priest, Miguel Pajares, who contracted the disease while helping patients at a hospital in the

Liberian capital Monrovia.

The missionary was the first patient in the outbreak to be evacuated to Europe for treatment. A specially equipped military Airbus A310 brought him to Madrid's Torrejon air base along with a Spanish nun, Juliana Bonoha Bohe, who had worked at the same Liberian hospital but did not test positive for the deadly haemorrhagic fever, the Spanish government said.

Immediately after landing yesterday morning, ambulances took the pair to Madrid's Carlos III Hospital, which specialises in tropical diseases.

The priest was stable and showing no sign of bleeding while the nun appeared to be well but would be re-tested for Ebola just in case, health officials said.

Two Americans who worked for Christian aid agencies in Liberia and were infected with Ebola while taking care of patients in Monrovia were taken back to the US for treatment in recent days.

They have shown signs of improvement after being given an experimental drug known as ZMapp, which is hard to produce on a large scale.

The vast majority of those infected face a far inferior level of health care at home.

There is no proven treatment or cure for Ebola and the use of the experimental drug has sparked controversy as Ebola experts call for it to be made available to African victims. - AFP