



12 November 2014 – While international health organizations do everything in their power to fight the Ebola crisis in West Africa, the virus affects societies on the other side of oceans, whether the virus itself is present or not. Citizens of African descent, as well as returning health workers and Ebola survivors, experience increased stigmatization and discrimination.

Today, the Ebola outbreak has killed nearly 5,000 people in West Africa and left the region on the brink of a major food crisis. Thousands more have survived the deadly virus, but are [ostracized](#) by fearful communities ravaged by the disease.

UNDP warns that [stigmatization](#) is one of the crucial elements that need to be tackled in the fight against the disease: as long as Ebola survivors are not accepted in the society, efforts made by the governments and the international community to tackle this health crisis will prove fruitless.

Stigmatization in the US

But with Ebola lurking around the corner, the anecdotal [evidence of stigmatization](#) is mounting in the US as well, with a growing perception that anyone of African descent may be carrying Ebola. Whether that person visited any of the affected countries appears to be of little relevance.

‘There is not a lot of knowledge in the US about Africa – let alone West Africa. They are painting the whole area with a very broad brush,’ says Bobby Digi, a local Staten Island activist. Lots of people ‘don’t understand how the virus is transmitted,’ he said, adding that Liberians were stigmatizing each other too.

Returning health workers placed in preventive quarantine

Meanwhile, three US states have introduced a [21-day quarantine](#) for all health workers who have had contact with Ebola patients. A decision strongly [opposed](#) by the United Nations, the White House, and several aid organizations and medical experts.

‘[Returning health workers](#) are exceptional people who are giving of themselves for humanity. They should not be subjected to restrictions that are not based on science’, said UN spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric.

President of the Staten Island Liberian Community Bestman-Yates said that although stigma on Staten Island was ‘getting worse, we are trying our best to educate people’.

‘This is not a West African problem. It’s a global problem and we have to fight it with education.’

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