



Tradition funerals become 'super-spreaders'

Clip from 'This World, Outbreak: The Truth About Ebola'

NARRATOR:

The death of one particular victim was about to take the outbreak to another level. Mendinor was a renowned healer. She soon succumbed to the virus and her body was prepared for burial. The corpse of an Ebola victim is highly infectious, but in West Africa, funerals involve the ritual washing of the body.

MATTU MORRU [ENGLISH TRANSLATION]:

We wash the body, we take clean clothes and then we put them on the body. You must wash under the arms, between the legs, cut the toenails... if the hair is loose, you braid it.

NARRATOR:

Burial practices played a major role in the spread of the virus. Mourners often touch the body at the funeral itself. The villagers feared that if they didn't bury Mendinor properly, there would be consequences.

MATTU MORRU [ENGLISH TRANSLATION]:

If someone is not buried properly her ghost will return and haunt people.

NARRATOR:

Medinor was a local celebrity and hundreds came to her funeral. It was a catastrophe. Scientists were later to call it a 'super-spreader' event, and ultimately linked hundreds of deaths back to Mendinor's burial. The outbreak was already raging in Guinea, and now it began to spread unchecked through the villages of Sierra Leone, wiping out entire families. The healer's niece even carried the virus 300 miles to Monrovia – the capital of neighbouring Liberia.