

By Liz Hull

A BOY from Sierra Leone has been banned from attending a British primary school because 'hysterical' parents are worried about ebola, his mother said yesterday.

Kofi Mason-Sesay, nine, was due to spend several days at St Simon's Catholic Primary School in Stockport, Greater Manchester, as part of an annual visit.

But despite being tested for ebola and given the all-clear on his arrival in Britain last week, parents mounted a campaign to have Kofi's trip cancelled, saying they feared he could pass on the deadly virus to their children.

Kofi's mother, Miriam Mason-Sesay, 48, who is English, branded the parents 'ignorant' after headmistress Elizabeth Imman bowed to the pressure and refused to allow the schoolboy, who has joint Sierra Leone and British citizenship, to attend classes.

Mrs Mason-Sesay, who moved to Sierra Leone from London to set up an education charity 14 years ago, said: 'We are being treated like lepers and it's very sad.'

'The school and its governors have been extremely supportive, but I'm afraid they've been put under undue pressure by an aggressive minority spreading panic and ignorance about this virus.'

'I am a reasonable citizen and mother - there is no way I would be wandering around with my nine-year-old if he had ebola. We have had

'A threat that knows no borders'

one case in Britain, but just one, because we contain it.

'It is a difficult disease to catch but that point has not been taken on by these ignorant parents. We have absolutely no contact with sick people - we're an education charity.'

Mrs Mason-Sesay set up EducAid, an organisation which aims to educate vulnerable children in Sierra Leone, with her brother in 2000. It teaches 3,000 youngsters across nine boarding schools, mostly in rural locations.

In 2003, she married a local tailor, Alhassan Sesay, and Kofi was born in London in 2005, but the family moved back to Sierra Leone four weeks later.

Mr Sesay died in 2009, aged just 35, of an infection which Mrs Mason-Sesay believes he would have survived if treated in the UK.

After his death, the charity worker decided she never wanted to travel without her son. Mrs Mason-Sesay returns to Britain twice a year to give talks to schools about the charity's work in Africa, so Kofi always accompanies her.

Once he reached school age, Kofi was offered an annual placement at St Simon's during his mother's visits and would attend classes for up to a month each year.

In a letter to parents, Mrs Imman said it was with a 'heavy heart' that she and the school governors had decided to cancel Kofi's visit because of 'misguided hysteria' of some parents.

She wrote: 'A significant number of parents have been in touch with me to express their fears. There are many parents who believe that the visit should have gone ahead and that we are contributing to misunderstandings by cancelling it.'

'In this instance, it has been very hard to juggle justice to Miriam and the views of parents.'

'It is with great sadness that we decided to cancel the visit; the misguided hysteria emerging is extremely disappointing, distracting us from our core purpose of educating our children and is not an environment that I would wish a visitor to experience.'

Parents yesterday defended

their stance. Richard Chamberlain, 36, said he had considered removing his two sons from the school if Kofi joined their classes.

He added: 'All the information we get in the media is that this disease has an incubation over 21 days, as far as we are concerned he could be ill by day 20 - who knows? The risk is not worth taking. I absolutely would be worried if he was here.'

Serenity McCann, 40, said the

'Ignorant parents'

school were right to cancel Kofi's visit.

She added: 'You can't risk anything with children. Even if they tested negative, the next day they could be positive.'

'I would be worried if they had let him come here. It hasn't been a major panic, just some parents emailing the head.'

But Peter Broom, whose two grandchildren are at the school, said: 'I think the school were over-reacting but they have got to listen to parents. If they are clear of the disease, I don't see the problem.'

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SCHOOLBOY 'TREATED LIKE A LEPER'

British primary school bans healthy nine-year-old from Sierra Leone to ease ebola fears of 'hysterical' parents

Will ebola come here?

It seems fairly likely. US scientists say there is a 50 per cent chance of it coming to Britain in the next three weeks.

What would happen?

Four major hospitals in London, Sheffield, Liverpool and Newcastle are on standby to tackle an outbreak. Anyone from a high-risk area who shows symptoms will be isolated and everyone they have been in contact with traced. Doctors say the risks of ebola spreading to the general population are incredibly small in a developed country. The disease has killed 3,800 people in West Africa partly because healthcare is so poor.

What are the symptoms?

A sudden onset of fever, headache, joint and muscle pain, sore throat and intense muscle weakness, followed by vomiting, a rash, stomach pain and diarrhoea. In the final stages patients bleed internally.

How can we screen for it?

Heat-sensitive cameras could reveal if passengers have high body temperatures. These passengers

Q&A

could be interviewed by doctors to find out if they are showing other symptoms of the disease.

Are there blood tests?
Yes, but they are unreliable. In the first few days after infection, the tests can wrongly give the all-clear.

How does it spread?

People are infected after coming into contact with blood, organs or bodily fluids - urine, vomit, saliva, stools, tears or semen - infected with the virus. The virus cannot get through skin, but enters the body through cuts and grazes, or through the mouth, nose and eyes. It can also be transmitted sexually. The virus lives for a few hours on hard surfaces, and can survive for a few days on the skin of dead victims.

Can I get it from a sneeze?

'If someone sneezes directly into your face and your eyes and lips or

mouth came into contact with the spray, there's a chance you could be infected,' says Prof David Evans, a virus expert at Warwick University.

Or door handles?

Unlikely. If someone in close physical contact with an ebola patient got the virus on their hands and opened a door, the virus could lurk there for a couple of hours before dying.

Or someone on a plane?

The virus is not airborne, so you would be at risk only if you came into direct contact with infected body fluids - for instance, if you used a dirty lavatory after an infected passenger, and if you then didn't wash your hands properly. Brushing against a sweaty arm would result in infection only if you had broken skin on your arm, or if you touched your arm with your hand and then rubbed your eyes or touched your mouth.

Can pets spread it?

Yes.

Could it become airborne?

Scientists say it is unlikely. Viruses don't usually change the way they get around.

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questionnaire. A thermal scanner is pointed at the passenger's forehead to detect an elevated fever. If the temperature is above normal, the passenger would be questioned about their movements and medical history, and taken for further tests.

Last night a No 10 source said Downing Street believed other actions were more effective than screening, but added that it had not been completely ruled out. 'The US are doing this, and we will want to look at how it is implemented and how effective it is,' the source said. 'We are not convinced it is effective, but we are staying flexible.'

US officials said screening ebola would start at five major airports - New York's John F Kennedy, Newark in New Jersey, Washington Dulles in the US capital, O'Hare in Chicago and Hartsfield-Jackson in Atlanta - as early

as this weekend. Passengers arriving from affected countries Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea will be given questionnaires and have their temperatures taken.

Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond said: 'The disease is an unprecedented threat that knows no borders. We now need the wider international community to step up to the plate. We all have to do more if we are going to prevent what is currently a crisis from becoming a catastrophe.'

Britain has the busiest air hubs in the world, receiving more passengers than any other nation from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. Although all direct flights between London and the three countries have been suspended, more than 6,000 people make the journey each month, changing in Brussels, Paris or Nigeria en route to Heathrow or Gatwick. The US, in comparison, sees between 3,000 and 6,000 passengers a month from the

region. Mr Hunt last night admitted the scale of the crisis was almost unprecedented.

'This is clearly one of the most serious global health emergencies of recent years - we are taking it incredibly seriously,' he said. 'Our first priority as the Government is to make sure the British people are safe. It is now entirely possible that someone with ebola will come to the UK either by one route or another.'

But Public Health England reiterated its reluctance to put screening measures into place. A spokesman said: 'There are no plans to introduce entry screening for ebola in the UK. This would require the UK to screen every returning traveller, as people could return to the UK from an affected country through any port of entry. This would be huge numbers of low-risk people.'

'Mr Vaz said more urgent action was needed. 'The best way to be safe is to make sure we put in preventative measures now,' he said.

'To hang on and not do this does not help the public feel there is confidence in the system.'

'We don't want to deal with this after the event just because we have the best health service in the world. We don't want to test it to see if it can cope with ebola.'

It emerged last night that every major hospital in England has been put on high alert over the crisis. City hospitals, specialist centres and intensive care units have been told to prepare for an influx of patients infected with the disease. 'Any hospital that has an infectious diseases unit or is able to isolate a patient is gearing up for this,' an NHS England source told the Daily Mail.

'The UK has only one high-level isolation ward equipped to deal with ebola - at the Royal Free Hospital in North London. Three other hospitals, in Sheffield, Newcastle and Liverpool, have been identified as possible ebola 'surge' centres if there was a large outbreak.



Ban: Kofi is not allowed to attend the school

Furious Spanish mob in demo after victim's pet dog is put down

Mail Foreign Service

A SPANISH ebola victim's pet dog was put down last night over fears it could transmit the disease, prompting outrage from animal lovers who chanted 'murderers' outside the woman's home.

Fury erupted after a government health spokesman confirmed that Teresa Romero Ramos's dog, Excalibur, had been destroyed. The official explained: 'Unfortunately we had no other choice.'

The animal was put to sleep inside Mrs Romero Ramos's home, which was disinfected before the animal's body was taken away in a white van to a nearby incinerator.

Demonstrators who mounted a vigil outside to try to stop the move shouted 'murderers' and several threw themselves on the ground as the vehicle left.

Some 300,000 people had already signed a petition urging authorities to spare Excalibur.

Twitter was awash with photographs of dogs, cats and birds which were posted alongside the hashtag 'SalvemosAExcalibur' - Spanish for 'Let's save Excalibur'.

Mrs Romero Ramos, 44, from Galicia in north-west Spain, who is one of the medical team that treated two repatriated Spanish priests who died from ebola, has been in quarantine since it was confirmed she was carrying the virus.

She has now admitted touching her face with her gloves as she took off a protective suit after leaving the room of one of the priests.

Mrs Romero Ramos confessed her accident to a doctor after earlier insisting that she had no idea how she became infected.

Hospital chief German Ramirez said yesterday - 48 hours after the launch of a probe into how Mrs Romero Ramos caught the virus - 'It looks like we have found the origin.'

But the speed with which he attributed the shock transmission to a 'slip-up' failed to silence critics who demanded that heads rolls after a string of spectacular mistakes by health co-ordinators.

Health minister Ana Mato is facing calls for her resignation after it emerged that Mrs Romero Ramos complained of feeling unwell six days before she was eventually admitted to hospital.

She was rushed to hospital by unprotected paramedics in a normal ambulance only taken out of service 12 hours later and found out she had



Infection risk: Teresa Romero Ramos and her dog Excalibur

ebola by reading a Spanish newspaper website as she waited to be quarantined.

Her home in Alcoreon near Madrid that she shares with husband Javier Limon Romero, one of those quarantined at Madrid's Carlos III Hospital, was not disinfected until yesterday morning.

Six people in total have now been quarantined since the start of Monday's crisis.

They include three other hospital nursing staff who helped treat Miguel Pajares and Manuel Garcia Viejo, the

'We had no other choice'

Spanish priests who died after they were repatriated from West Africa.

Mrs Romero Ramos was reportedly feeling better after being treated with antibodies from an ebola survivor. She told a Spanish TV station by phone: 'Today I'm better. It's slow going but I'm better.'

Revealing how she discovered she was infected, she said: 'Nobody told me anything. I suspected something because at the beginning the nurses and doctors came in

every hour, then they stopped coming in and I thought that something was up.'

'I got hold of my mobile and that's when I saw on the website of El Pais newspaper that I had tested positive for ebola twice. Nobody ever told me to my face, "Teresa you've got ebola".'

She went on to say that she had been given only 20 minutes' training in how to put on and take off her protective suit.

THE TRUTH

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Agony of lovers who can only talk by video

THE British girlfriend of photjournalist Ashoka Mukpo said watching him battle ebola is 'heart-wrenching'. Helen Finlay said that Mr Mukpo, 33, who was flown to the US from Liberia on Monday, waved to her as he left the plane and had spoken to her via video-link from his isolation unit at Nebraska Medical Center.

She added: 'When you have a loved one who is as sick as he is, you want to curl up next to them and tell them "you're going to be okay" and be close to them, and obviously you can't do that. It is a little bit hard. I miss him, I really miss him.'

Mr Mukpo was working for NBC as a cameraman when he developed symptoms.