



NB: This is not a word-for-word transcript

**Rob:** Hello I'm Rob. Welcome to 6 Minute English. I'm joined today by Feifei. Hello Feifei.

**Feifei:** Hello, Rob.

**Rob:** Today we're talking about quite a controversial subject: the use of **experimental drugs** to treat disease. And, as always, you'll learn some vocabulary – so you can talk about the topic too.

**Feifei:** Experimental drugs are medicines which are still being tested – they haven't yet been officially approved. And experimental drugs are a very hot topic with the recent cases of Ebola in West Africa.

**Rob:** Ebola is caused by a virus for which there is no cure yet, and the **mortality rate** is high. The mortality rate is the proportion of people in a particular group who actually die of the disease.

**Feifei:** Hundreds of people have been infected in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and over half have died.

**Rob:** So – the World Health Organisation decided to allow the use of experimental drugs on people with the virus.

**Feifei:** This is something very risky. The drug might cause unexpected changes in the body and make the patient worse. These are what we call **side effects**.

**Rob:** But before we talk any more about experimental drugs, let's go for our usual question. So Feifei, how much do you know about the Ebola virus?

**Feifei:** I'm afraid I don't know very much, but I have been following it on the news.

**Rob:** OK. Well, maybe you'll have to have a guess on this question. The virus Ebola got its name after a river in the northern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. But when was it discovered? Was it in:

- a) 1966
- b) 1976 or
- c) 1986

**Feifei:** Well, I'm not really sure but I'm gonna go with answer (b) 1976.

**Rob:** Well, we'll have the answer at the end of the programme. Now, let's get back to our topic – experimental drugs. The World Health Organisation (the WHO)

announced they would allow the use of these drugs on humans, but... only under certain conditions.

**Feifei:** What are the conditions?

**Rob:** Well, with the answer is Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, who works for the WHO. Which word does she use to mean the patient gives permission for the drug to be used?

**Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, from the World Health Organisation:**

*Transparency about all aspects of care, informed **consent**, freedom of choice, confidentiality, respect for person and preservation of dignity, and with the involvement of the community.*

**Feifei:** The word for permission was 'consent'. And 'informed consent' was one of the conditions.

**Rob:** 'Informed consent' means permission given by the patient after they've been told of the risks of using the drug.

**Feifei:** I wonder what would happen if it didn't work or if the patient had a bad reaction – might they sue the doctor?

**Rob:** That's a very interesting point. The Health Minister of Liberia, Walter Gwenigale, has already said that people won't be allowed to sue if the drug doesn't work or if it makes them worse. Listen to what he says now and see if you can identify the word he uses to mean being 'legally responsible' for something.

**Walter Gwenigale , Health Minister of Liberia:**

*We are not just going to take them and start using them. It's an experimental drug so people have to sign a **waiver** and ask us to give it to them. Because it's not just like a drug that is for general use. If you want us to try the drug on you, you have to say that we are not **liable** for anything that happens to you as a consequence of receiving the drug.*

**Feifei:** He's very direct: neither the government nor the doctors are liable – that's the word which means legally responsible - if something bad happens to you.

**Rob:** And that's why if you are infected with the virus you have to sign a waiver.

**Feifei:** A waiver. This is a formal document in which the person says they've given up a right or claim – in this case, the right to take others to court.

**Rob:** Yes. That's right.

**Feifei:** So - people who are infected with Ebola can talk to a doctor, sign this document, this waiver, and get the medicine...

**Rob:** Well, not exactly – because not everyone gets it.

**Feifei:** And why is that?

**Rob:** It's still experimental – and not much of it has been produced so there might not be enough for all who need it. So do you give it to the sickest who are likely to die, or to those not so sick who might recover with the help of the drug? It's a big **dilemma**. A dilemma is a situation in which a choice has to be made between different things and one is not much better than the other.

**Feifei:** Quite a dilemma, indeed.

**Rob:** Now, let's get back to our quiz. I asked when the Ebola virus was discovered. Was it in 1966, 1976 or 1986?

**Feifei:** And I said 1976.

**Rob:** You were indeed right. It was discovered in 1976. Interestingly we don't really know which animal carries the Ebola virus, although bats have long been suspected and this makes prevention and controlling Ebola quite difficult. Okay. Well, we're almost at the end of the programme so let's recall some of the words that we've used today.

**Feifei:** We heard:

**experimental drug**  
**mortality rate**  
**side effects**  
**consent**  
**waiver**  
**liable**  
**dilemma**

**Rob:** Thanks Feifei. Well that's it for this programme. Please join us again soon for 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English.

**Both:** Bye.

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>experimental drug</b>	medicine which has not been fully tested
<b>mortality rate</b>	proportion of people in a particular group who die
<b>side effects</b>	effects of a particular medicine that are not intended
<b>consent</b>	permission
<b>waiver</b>	formal document in which a person gives up rights to something
<b>liable</b>	legally responsible
<b>dilemma</b>	a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made

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### Story about Ebola virus:

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