

## An update on Ebola virus disease outbreak, Democratic Republic of Congo

The Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak in northeast Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) still remains a serious public health concern internationally since the outbreak was declared on 1 August 2018. From 13 to 19 April 2020, four new confirmed cases of EVD were reported in the DRC, all from Beni Health Zone in North Kivu Province. Three out of these four cases were registered as contacts, though none were regularly followed by the response team because of insecurity and ongoing challenges with community reticence.

In total, six cases have been reported since 10 April, four of whom have died. Currently, there is one confirmed case receiving care at an Ebola treatment centre and one who remains in the community; response teams are engaging with the community in order to address this. Prior to the emergence of this cluster in Beni, the last person confirmed to have EVD tested negative twice and was discharged from a treatment centre on 3 March 2020.

As of 19 April 2020, a total of 3 461 EVD cases, including 3 316 confirmed and 145 probable has been reported, of which 2 279 cases died (overall case fatality ratio 66%). Of the total confirmed and probable cases, 56% (1 943) were female, 28% (983) were children aged less than 18 years, and 5% (171) were healthcare workers.

From 13 to 19 April 2020, an average of 1 894 alerts were reported and investigated per day. Of these, an average of 187 alerts were validated

as suspected cases each day. The alert rate has decreased and remains suboptimal in the past three weeks as teams are pulled into other emergencies, including coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). During this same period, 1 030 samples were tested, including 583 blood samples from alive, suspected cases; 267 swabs from community deaths; and 180 samples from re-tested patients. Overall, laboratory activities increased by 6% compared to the previous week.

Over 249 000 contacts have been registered since the beginning of the outbreak. A total of 638 contacts of the six new cases since 10 April have been registered, of which 476 were followed on 19 April 2020. A total of 346 of these contacts have been vaccinated. As of 19 April, 25% of contacts have not been followed due to insecurity and ongoing challenges in the with community. Ebola treatment centres (ETCs), transit centres (TCs), and decentralised transit centres continue to operate across outbreak affected areas, providing timely care and diagnoses for suspected EVD cases.

As of 19 April 2020, 196 people received the rVSV-ZEBOC-GP vaccine in Kasanga Health Area, Beni Health Zone, in the past week, bringing the total number of people vaccinated since August 2018 to 301 978. While approximately 6 000 doses are available in Beni Health Zone, WHO anticipates potential longer-term challenges with the vaccine pipeline due to limited

flight ability as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Under the overall leadership of the Government of the DRC in support of the Ministry of Health, WHO is supporting public health operations and regional preparedness as outlined in the Strategic Response Plan. WHO still advises against any restriction of travel to, and trade with, the DRC based on the currently available information. WHO continues to closely monitor and, if necessary, verify travel and trade measures in relation to this event. Travellers should seek medical advice before travel and should practice good hygiene.

The new confirmed cases were identified 40 days after the last person tested negative and was discharged from care; however, this is not unexpected. The WHO recommended criteria for declaring the end of the EVD outbreak includes a 42-day waiting period because undetected chains of transmission or new flare-ups may arise. It is essential to remain vigilant and maintain appropriate levels of surveillance to rapidly detect and respond to relapse, re-introduction or new emergence events, so as to implement effective control measures, as well as continue to engage community leaders to address or mitigate community mistrust in affected areas.

As of 28 April 2020, there are no EVD cases reported in South Africa associated with the current outbreak in the DRC. In addition, there are no suspected cases of EVD in South Africa at present.

**Article source:** WHO: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int); WHO-AFRO, Division of Public Health Surveillance and Response, NICD-NHLS; [outbreak@nicd.ac.za](mailto:outbreak@nicd.ac.za)