

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

On 1 June 2020, seven cases of Ebola were reported in Mbandaka city and neighbouring Bikoro Health Zone in Équateur Province, and an 11<sup>th</sup> Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was declared.

Genetic sequence analysis by the DRC's National Institute of Biomedical Research (INRB) found that the new virus circulating in the Équateur Province in western DRC is different from the 10<sup>th</sup> EVD outbreak, which infected more than 3 400 people in the eastern part of the country. The genetic sequencing analysis also found that the virus in this outbreak is distinct from the previous one that hit the same region in 2018. An investigation is ongoing to determine the source of the new outbreak, but it is likely that it originated from an animal source.

The outbreak in Équateur Province continues to evolve, with 19 health areas in six health zones affected. As of 16 July 2020, there is a total of 58 cases (54 confirmed and four probable), including 22 deaths (case fatality ratio 37.9%). The case fatality ratio among confirmed cases is 33% (18 deaths/54 confirmed cases). Three health workers are among the confirmed cases, making up 5.2% of all cases. One of the new cases confirmed on 16 July 2020 in the Bolomba Health Zone was not listed as a contact or vaccinated, although there were two suspicious deaths in his close family, including his wife. Further investigations are underway to confirm if this is part of the current transmission chain or a new outbreak.

Five out of the six health zones reported contacts on 16 July 2020. Of the 476 new contacts reported, 255 (53.6%) were reported from Bikoro and 192 (40.3%) from Bolomba. Out of 5 929 active contacts, 5 259 (88.7%) had been seen in the previous 24 hours. Of the 179 contacts who were not seen in this 24-hour period, 66 (36.9%)

have never been seen, 63 (35.2%) were not seen in the past 24 hours, 27 (15.1%) were away from home and 23 (12.8%) are lost to follow-up. In addition, 36 contacts have become symptomatic, including 21 in Bikoro, nine in Bolombo, four in Mbandaka and two in Iboko. Two contacts completed their follow-up period in Bolomba.

From 5 June 2020 to 16 July 2020, a total of 12 640 people has been vaccinated. An additional 430 people were vaccinated with rVSV-ZEBOV-GP on 16 July 2020, including 175 high risk contacts, 241 contacts of contacts and 14 probable contacts.

The EVD outbreak in Équateur Province is escalating, with increasing new confirmed cases along with geographical spread to new health areas. The continued presence of confirmed cases in the community is of particular concern, with the risk of further transmission arising as a result, along with contacts completely lost to follow-up. The COVID-19 outbreak in the country is also showing rising case incidence – as of 16 July 2020 the DRC was in ninth position in the WHO-African Region, which means that the country's response mechanisms are likely to be particularly burdened by these simultaneous outbreaks of major infectious diseases.

The WHO reports that the ongoing EVD outbreak requires robust response activities in order to control it rapidly, breaking the chains of transmission and engaging the community in these activities. The response to EVD should be linked to existing COVID-19 activities in order to use resources efficiently. These efforts should be encouraged and supported nationally and by partners.

As of 27 July 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)