

INTERNATIONAL OUTBREAKS OF IMPORTANCE

An update on Ebola virus disease outbreak, DRC and Guinea

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on 7 February 2021, an Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak was declared in the city of Butembo, North Kivu Province. The index case was an adult female living in Biena Health Zone. Worryingly, the EVD outbreak initially reported in the Biena Health Zone has spread to other health zones and areas.

One new confirmed case has been recorded on 13 February, a healthcare worker known to be high-risk, working at Matanda Hospital in the Katwa Health Zone, living in the Musienene Health Zone. This brings the total number of confirmed cases, since the onset of the outbreak, to four, with two deaths (case fatality 50%). One high-risk contact is in isolation in Butembo Health Zone after developing symptoms suggestive of EVD. Fourteen contacts from Katwa Health Zone have been transferred to Butembo Health Zone for follow up.

A total of 43 (29%) out of 149 eligible contacts has been vaccinated in the Masoya Health Area, Biena Health Zone. In the Katwa Health Zone, contact listing and case investigation around the third and fourth confirmed cases is ongoing. The rate of contact follow-up varies from 29% in Butembo, to 83% in Biena, to 90% in Katwa Health Zones.

Psychosocial support for contacts and relatives of confirmed cases is being provided. Community action groups, youth groups and community leaders in Masoya health area are strengthening communications for vaccination, while training of vaccination teams in Butembo, Katwa and Biena health zones is underway. There is continued rehabilitation and construction of Katwa and Masoya Ebola treatment centres (ETCs).

Existing challenges include poor reporting of alerts by health zones, limited human resources for contact follow-up, and inadequate means of communication and poor logistics in the affected areas. Others include poor access to water in Masoya health facility and a lack of suitably adapted ambulances for patient and medicine transport for case management.

Both national and regional authorities, and partners, need to urgently strengthen surveillance in health zones and ensure that the ETCs in Masoya and Katwa are operational for both

suspected and confirmed cases.

Meanwhile, on 14 February 2021, health authorities in Guinea declared an outbreak in the rural community of Gouéké in N'Zerekore prefecture, after three Ebola cases were confirmed by the national laboratory. A nurse from a local facility, initially diagnosed with malaria five days prior, died on 28 January 2021, and was buried on 1 February 2021 in Gouéké. Following her burial, six people who attended the funeral reported Ebola-like symptoms; two of them have died, while the other four have been hospitalised. Currently, a total of seven cases has been reported, with three deaths (case fatality ratio 42.9%).

Epidemiologists and infection prevention and control staff have been deployed by WHO to health facilities and other key locations. WHO is also providing support in the procurement of vaccines. Active case search, contact listing and follow-up are underway, while suspected cases are being managed in the treatment centre in N'Zerekore. Two safe and dignified burials were carried out in N'Zerekore. Samples have been sent to Institut Pasteur in Senegal for full genome sequencing. Cross-border community surveillance is being strengthened with Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as the testing capacity and surveillance in health facilities in these neighbouring countries.

During the largest EVD outbreak, the West Africa Ebola outbreak 2014-2016, Guinea was one of the three most affected countries. EVD re-emergence is of grave concern. Although health teams have acted rapidly in the country to trace the pathway of the virus and curb infection, challenges still remain around unsafe burials, poor infection prevention and control measures, and a lack of Ebola rapid detection tests at hospitals in the area. There is an urgent need for national authorities and partners to address shortfalls in response activities and ensure rapid containment of the outbreak.

As of 23 February 2021, there are no EVD cases reported in South Africa associated with the current outbreak in the DRC and Guinea. In addition, there are no suspected cases of EVD in South Africa at present.