

INTERNATIONAL OUTBREAKS OF IMPORTANCE

An update on Ebola virus disease outbreak, DRC and Guinea

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Ebola virus disease (EVD) outbreak in North Kivu is ongoing, although no new cases have been confirmed over the last 13 consecutive days. In Biena health zone, the contact who became a suspected case on day 16, has tested negative and is awaiting a second sample test result while remaining in isolation.

As of 14 March 2021, a total of 12 cases (11 confirmed and one probable), and five deaths (case fatality ratio 45.5%) has occurred. Two of the confirmed cases are healthcare workers. Two confirmed EVD cases are still undergoing treatment, while 34 suspect cases are being monitored in isolation facilities. Four cases have recovered and have been discharged.

Since the beginning of the outbreak, a total of 345 contacts has been established, 286 (83.0%) of whom were followed-up. One-hundred-and-twenty (34.8%) and 225 (65.2%) of these contacts are in their second and third respective weeks of follow-up.

A total of 416 alerts has been raised, of which 411 were investigated (96.0%), and 95 were verified as true, including 72 alive alerts and 23 deaths. Since the start of the epidemic, 1 590 laboratory samples have been analysed, of which 11 (0.7%) have tested positive for EVD.

As of 14 March 2021, a total of 1 515 people has been vaccinated; including 135 contacts, 450 contacts of contacts and 930 probable contacts. Of the 1 515 persons vaccinated, 866 (57.2%) are in Biena, 290 (19.1%) in Butembo and 51 (3.4%) in Musienene health zones. Ring vaccination in Butembo health zone has been suspended following security threats. Screening of travellers at entry points to the country continues.

The ongoing EVD outbreak remains a serious concern, with challenges around the response, including low number of alerts in other affected and at-risk health zones, contacts refusing vaccination and other contacts remaining unseen. EVD awareness needs strengthening by authorities in order to support community activities including vaccination, alert notification and contact follow-up; and mobilise resources to support the response.

Meanwhile, the EVD outbreak in Guinea continues since its declaration on 14 February 2021. As of 13 March 2021, a total of 18 cases (14 confirmed and 4 probable) and nine deaths

(case fatality ratio 50.0%) has been reported. Currently, only one health district remains active (reporting at least one confirmed case) and two health districts out of 38 are on alert (have at least one contact).

Five of the confirmed EVD cases in Guinea are healthcare workers. Three patients (all confirmed cases) are currently hospitalised in the Epidemic Diseases Treatment Centre in the country's N'Zerekore city.

Out of 368 contacts, 341 (93.0%) are being followed up. Five contacts have migrated, four are within Guinea (Conakry, Dinguiraye, Tougue and Yomou) and one outside Guinea (in the country of Côte d'Ivoire), are being actively traced.

A total of 3 332 people has been vaccinated, including 288 high-risk contacts, 2 602 contacts-of-contacts, 442 probable contacts.

Training and deployment of local agents to strengthen active case finding is ongoing. Case management in affected regions is being supported by partners, and safe and dignified burial teams are being trained by the Red Cross.

The EVD outbreak in Butembo, North Kivu, DRC, remains confined to three health zones; however, challenges remain with community resistance, community surveillance, contact follow-up, safe and dignified burial practices, as well as poor communication, logistics and inadequate funding in affected areas. Guinea authorities are faced with similar challenges.

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 24 March 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.