

WHO making progress in DRC's Ebola crisis

It's been a little over a month since the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was declared by the Ministry of Health. In the hotspot of Mangina, which is a rural community much progress has been made, but a new case in the city of Butembo is raising concern.



Photo: WHO

"Now everything is working very well. You can see the number of cases in Mangina is going down on a daily basis. We need to continue the same effort to make sure that all cases are controlled in Mangina," says Dr Ibrahima Socé Fall, World Health Organisation (WHO) Africa emergencies director, who visited community, where many of the first confirmed cases originated and found the work done by the Ministry of Health, the (WHO), and other partners impressive.

However, about 90 km away in the bustling city of Butembo with a population of around one million, a new case was confirmed on 4 September by health authorities. The case is the mother of a woman who died of Ebola in Beni, which is close to Mangina.

"Butembo is the new hotspot. It's important for the response to be quick and strong, combining all the key components, with strong community mobilisation to stop the virus from spreading in this new hotspot," she said.

Butembo is a major trading centre, with a highly mobile population that comes from not only other parts of the DRC, but also from neighbouring Rwanda and Uganda and even as far away as Kenya.

Managing an outbreak of Ebola is challenging, but the security situation in North Kivu creates new complexities, often hampering access to high risk communities.

Despite the difficult situation, under the leadership of the Ministry of Health, WHO and partners are scaling up the response to the outbreak in Butembo. More than 60 WHO experts are in the city, setting up key operations.

Emergency operations centre

Along with health authorities and Médecins Sans Frontières, WHO's team leader for the Butembo outbreak, Dr Marie Roseline Darnycka Belizaire visited the grounds where the new emergency treatment centre is likely to be set up. The emergency operations centre, which will be the nerve centre of the fight against Ebola in Butembo is also being built and is expected to be operational early this week.

"The next two weeks will be crucial to controlling the outbreak in Butembo and we have already made good progress in putting in place crucial elements for an effective fight against Ebola," said Belizaire.

A mobile laboratory is now operational and has begun to accept samples and conduct diagnostic tests to determine whether they are positive or negative for the Ebola virus.

In an effort to strengthen response activities, ring vaccination of healthcare workers, as well as of the contacts and contacts of contacts of the confirmed case from Butembo began last week. So far more than 200 people have been vaccinated. WHO experts are also visiting health clinics and explaining the benefits of being vaccinated against Ebola.

Communication channels

WHO and Unicef risk communication experts have been working with health authorities to engage with key communities and raise awareness regarding the symptoms of Ebola and how to prevent it, as well as what to do if a case is suspected. On 8 September, more than 300 community leaders were sensitised in a briefing at the city hall.

"As leaders, we can't accept that our people catch the disease, especially since it is very dangerous. We are going to popularise this information among our people as we are community leaders," Katsaruhane Kasera, chief of Kambali ward, who participated in the briefing, said.

In another training, WHO worked with 50 radio and television reporters to increase their cooperation in reaching out to the public with key messages including the signs and symptoms of Ebola, encouraging people to bring patients early to the Ebola Treatment Centre and accepting safe and dignified burials.

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