

Ebola Outbreak

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Photo: IFRC/Maria Santto

Responding to the second deadliest Ebola outbreak in history

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) is in the grips of its worst ever Ebola outbreak, and the second largest ever after the 2014 West Africa outbreak. The current outbreak which began on 1 August has spread to 23 health zones in North Kivu and Ituri provinces.

This outbreak is incredibly complex. It is unfolding in a region affected by a two decades-long conflict that has claimed countless lives and deprived millions of even the most basic needs and services. The humanitarian needs are great, the situation for millions of people is unbearable, and people's coping mechanisms are continuously being eroded. The current Ebola outbreak is only making things worse for the Congolese, while violence and insecurity make the response extremely challenging.

On 11 June, Uganda confirmed the first of three Ebola cases near the border of DR Congo, but luckily, local transmission did not occur. However, the risk of further spread to additional health zones, neighbouring

provinces, and in neighbouring countries including Uganda, Rwanda and elsewhere, remains very high.

The Red Cross Movement is at the forefront of the community response with DRC Red Cross volunteers, many of whom live and work in Ebola-affected communities. Red Cross volunteers are playing a vital role in maintaining a strong dialogue with communities, ensuring questions, misbeliefs and rumours are discussed and addressed regularly. They are also taking a lead role in conducting safe and dignified burials to reduce transmission in communities and are supporting hospitals and health facilities with infection prevention and control measures. A dedicated team is also providing crucial psychosocial support to the 1,400 volunteers active in the response in DRC.

The response also includes protecting people in prisons from Ebola. We are working in prisons in the affected areas to improve infection prevention control measures so that people in detention can be monitored for Ebola-like symptoms and isolated quickly if needed.

Red Cross in action



1.3 million+ people

reached through community engagement and mass sensitization activities in DR Congo and 4.1 million in neighbouring countries.



5,722 safe and dignified burials

have successfully been completed by Red Cross or Civil Protection teams.



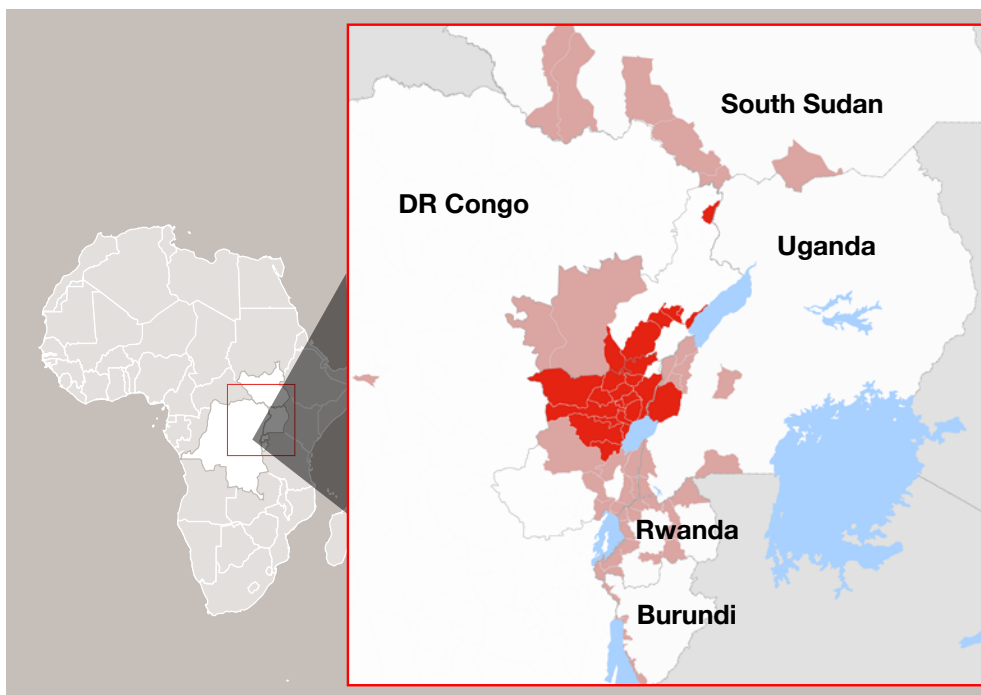
298,000+ community feedback data points

collected from community members (including their concerns, fears and questions).



779,000+ people

screened at 14 health facilities supported with infection prevention and control.



Areas of operation

- Affected health zone:** safe and dignified burials, sensitization and community engagement, proper hand washing, sanitation and disinfection activities and infection prevention and control in health facilities.
- Bordering provinces and countries:** containment activities in surrounding provinces and neighbouring four countries (Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda).

Placing communities at the centre of the response

Without the community, Ebola cannot be eliminated. We need to listen to community concerns and fears, plan together with them and adapt our response in order to create trust and acceptance by humanitarian actors.

In many Ebola-affected areas, years of conflict has eroded basic services and created mistrust in the community. Ebola is exacerbating the mistrust and lack of confidence and many communities feel that the response is not addressing their broader humanitarian needs. It is clear that some vulnerable communities do not trust Ebola responders and this is stopping them from accessing health care. There may be many more potential cases in communities that we are unaware of, who are not accessing lifesaving care and may be further transmitting the virus within their communities.

Their work is often painstaking. But it is successful. For example, the success rate of burials has remained consistently high at 80 per cent, while negative feedback has dropped over time as a result of quality community

engagement work and changes in the Red Cross approaches based on feedback data. Community resistance for safe and dignified burials have drastically declined from 79 per cent in the first two months of the operation to 8 per cent now.

In partnership with the Centre of Disease Control, Red Cross volunteers are collecting rumours, suspicions and concerns into a first-of-its-kind feedback and tracking system that has coded over 298,000 feedback points.

These points have helped inform us that we need to:

- Increase local capacity of front-line workers and utilize community influencers
- Enhance knowledge sharing among partners
- Normalize and de-dramatize the disease, moving towards a health-wide response beyond Ebola
- Listen more to communities. Communities have very precise recurring questions that need to be addressed