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Going house-to-house to prevent Ebola

UNICEF and partners have trained over 10,000 community health workers in Rwanda to visit families and teach them how to prevent Ebola.

By Laura Wotton

📅 08 August 2019

MUSANZE, Rwanda - In Umwidagaduro Village, Daniel Munyankindi knocks on his neighbour's door and steps inside. It is not the first house he has visited today, but he takes a seat and warmly addresses the family with fresh enthusiasm. At first glance, it seems like an informal visit, but Daniel is here with an important agenda.

"Tell me, what do you know about Ebola?" Daniel asks the family.

One of four community health workers in Umwidagaduro, Daniel has been trained to help raise awareness around Ebola prevention. Visiting families in his community, he teaches the signs and symptoms of Ebola, how to get treatment, and how to prevent the disease from spreading.



Ebola prevention starts at home

Five months ago, UNICEF and its partner Global Humanitarian and Development Foundation (GHDF) introduced the home visit programme in Rwanda's 15 districts at high-risk for Ebola transmission. About 10,000 community health workers were trained, aiming to reach 30,000 houses.

"When you meet people in their homes, you are more connected. You can exchange information easily, because people feel free to discuss their ideas and ask questions."

Daniel, Community Health Worker in Musanze

Incredibly, health workers like Daniel have already reached over 43,000 homes with potentially life-saving advice on Ebola.

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"The impact is huge," he smiles. "When I visit families, I find that more than 50 per cent already know a lot about Ebola and how to prevent it. We are passing on our own knowledge and training to our communities."



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Daniel distributes leaflets on Ebola prevention measures, designed by UNICEF, to a group of boys in his community ahead

Discussing with the family he visits, Daniel gestures to a colourful leaflet depicting Ebola symptoms. Communication materials like these were designed by UNICEF and distributed across thousands of villages.

With the threat of Ebola looming, over 1,500 additional health workers have been trained. UNICEF and GHDF have set a new target of 115,780 homes, a stark reminder of the work left ahead.

“So far, I have visited 25 homes,” says Daniel. “I think this method of visiting homes is much better than mass broadcasting. You just connect better.”



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Daniel sits with a family in their home to discuss the signs and symptoms of Ebola and how people can prevent the disease from spreading.

To prevent Ebola from reaching Rwanda, UNICEF supports the Government's National Contingency Plan through community mobilisation and engagement, providing information and platforms for discussion through mass media, and developing communication materials on Ebola signs, symptoms, treatment and prevention measures. UNICEF has also developed educational materials for schools, trained over 10,000 community health workers on risk communication, and supported 24 hospitals, 259 health centres and 21 points of entry with necessary supplies. Over 6 million

people have been reached, with efforts ongoing to prepare communities in Rwanda's 15 high-risk districts.

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