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Democratic Republic of the Congo declares Ebola outbreak over

16 December 2021

Brazzaville/Kinshasa – The Ebola outbreak that erupted in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s North Kivu Province in October – the second in 2021 – was today declared over, the national health authorities announced after no new cases were reported at the end of a 42-day countdown, or two incubation periods after the last confirmed case was discharged.

In total, 11 cases (eight confirmed, three probable), including six deaths were reported in the outbreak that was declared on 8 October after a new case was confirmed in Beni health zone in the country's North Kivu Province. This was the country's 13th outbreak and occurred in the same area as the 2018 outbreak which lasted two years.

More than 1800 people were vaccinated in a campaign that kicked off just five days after the first case was detected. The outbreak marks the first time the recently-licensed ERVEBO vaccine against Ebola was used in the country. ERVEBO is the same as the compassionate-use vaccine, but as a licensed vaccine, rollout is less cumbersome operationally.

"Stronger disease surveillance, community engagement, targeted vaccination and prompt response are making for more effective Ebola containment in the region," said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Africa. "During this outbreak, the Democratic Republic of Congo was able to limit widespread infections and save lives. Crucial lessons are being learned and applied with every outbreak experience."

Swift response comprising key outbreak control measures such as contact tracing, testing, disease surveillance as well as community collaboration efforts helped contain the outbreak within Beni, where the initial case was detected. In support of the country, WHO deployed experts, supplies, and contributed funds to help contain the outbreak.

However, unpredictable and sometimes volatile security in parts of Beni hampered response in some localities, with health workers and other frontline responders unable to access insecure areas to monitor high-risk contacts or administer vaccines.

The prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation was a core pillar of the response. An expert was deployed to train WHO personnel and partners on preventing inappropriate and abusive behaviour. Every person involved in field work received training and each partner agency signed a code of conduct. Trainers engaged directly with community members where health authorities were working to raise awareness about sexual exploitation and abuse and how to report it safely. Radio spots and pamphlets in local languages also helped spread the message.

With the outbreak now declared over, the health authorities are maintaining surveillance and are ready to respond quickly to any flare-ups. It is not unusual for sporadic cases to occur following a major outbreak. Results from genome sequencing conducted by the country's National Institute of Biomedical Research found that the first Ebola case detected in the just-ended outbreak likely

represented a new flare-up of the 2018–2020 Ebola outbreak due persistence of the virus in the community.

The country has set up an Ebola Survivor Programme which currently has more than 1100 people from previous outbreaks in North Kivu Province. The two survivors from the now-ended outbreak have been enrolled in the survivor programme. For the next 18 months they will receive monthly check-ups, which include medical evaluations, psychological and nutritional support.

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