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Democratic Republic of Congo declares new Ebola outbreak in Mbandaka

23 April 2022

Brazzaville/Kinshasa, 23 April 2022 – The health authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo today declared an outbreak of Ebola after a case was confirmed in Mbandaka, a city in the north-western Equateur Province. This is the third outbreak in the province since 2018.

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So far, just one case has been confirmed. The patient, a 31-year-old man, began experiencing symptoms on 5 April and after more than a week of care at home, sought treatment at a local health facility. On 21 April, the patient was admitted to an Ebola treatment centre for intensive care but died later that day. Having recognized the symptoms, health workers immediately submitted samples to test for Ebola virus disease. Investigations to determine the source of the outbreak are ongoing.

“Time is not on our side,” said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Director for Africa. “The disease has had a two-week head start and we are now playing catch-up. The positive news is that health authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have more experience than anyone else in the world at controlling Ebola outbreaks quickly.”

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is experiencing its fourteenth Ebola outbreaks since 1976. The current outbreak is the sixth since 2018 alone – the most frequent occurrence in the country’s Ebola history. Previous outbreaks in Equateur Province were in 2020 and 2018, with 130 and 54 recorded cases respectively.

Efforts to stem the current outbreak are already underway. The deceased patient received a safe and dignified burial, which involves modifying traditional funeral ceremonies in a way that minimizes the risk of contagious fluids infecting attendees. Anyone who came in contact with the patient are also being identified and their health will be monitored. The health facility where the patient received care has been decontaminated.

WHO experts based in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are supporting the national authorities to ramp up key outbreak response areas including testing, contact tracing, infection prevention and control, treatment as well as working with communities to support the public health measures to prevent infections.

Vaccination is set to kick off in the coming days. The country already has stockpiles of the rVSV-ZEBOV Ebola vaccine available in the cities of Goma and Kinshasa. Vaccines will be sent to Mbandaka and administered through ‘ring vaccination’ strategy—where contacts and contacts of contacts are vaccinated to curb the spread of the virus and protect lives.

“Many people in Mbandaka are already vaccinated against Ebola, which should help reduce the impact of the disease,” said Dr Moeti. “All those who were vaccinated during the 2020 outbreak will be revaccinated.”

Ebola is a severe, often fatal illness affecting humans and other primates. Case

fatality rates have varied from 25% to 90% in past outbreaks. There is now effective treatment available and if patients receive treatment early, as well as supportive care, their chances of survival improve significantly.

For Additional Information or to Request Interviews, Please contact:

Eugene Kabambi

Emergency Communications Officer

Tel : +243 81 715 1697

Office : +47 241 39 027

Email: kabambie@who.int (mailto:kabambie@who.int)

Meenakshi Dalal

Communications Consultant

Email: dalalm@who.int (mailto:dalalm@who.int)

Tel: + 1 (682) 812 2306 (WhatsApp)

Sakuya OKA

Communications Manager

WHO Regional Office for Africa

Cell: +242 06 508 1009

Email: okas@who.int (mailto:okas@who.int)

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