

Congo says Ebola cases have reached 30, warns against rumors

May 24 2018, by Saleh Mwanamilongo



In this May 22, 2018 photo provided by UNICEF, schoolchildren wash their hands to help contain the Ebola outbreak before entering a classroom in the north-western city of Mbandaka, in Congo. Congo's health ministry announced six new confirmed Ebola cases and two new suspected cases Tuesday as vaccinations entered a second day in an effort to contain the deadly virus in the city of more than 1 million. (Mark Naftalin/UNICEF via AP)

Congo's Ministry of Health said Thursday the number of confirmed Ebola cases has reached 30, including eight deaths in the three affected

health zones in the country's Equateur province.

The ministry gave the toll after surveillance teams in the capital, Kinshasa, were deployed along the Congo River to monitor people coming in there.

Health brigades have also been set up at various entry points to Kinshasa and other cities as part of prevention, said the World Health Organization's Congo representative Allarangar Yakouide.

"We want to ensure that ports and airports are effectively protected," he said.

A wave of panic hit Kinshasa on Wednesday, after rumors of an Ebola case admitted to the Kinshasa General Hospital. But Yakouide quickly denied it, saying that no cases are confirmed in the capital. He warned against spreading false reports which "could create panic and undermine the effectiveness of the response to the Ebola outbreak."

As of Thursday, Congo's health ministry reports a total of 58 cases of hemorrhagic fever: 30 confirmed Ebola cases, 14 probable and 14 suspected. It said that it was unable to confirm if a death in Bikoro was Ebola after the local residents refused to allow officials to take blood samples.

Border health officers monitored passengers arriving at Ngobila Beach in Kinshasa, which serves as the crossing from Brazzaville, Republic of Congo into Congo. Health workers on Wednesday began registering passengers arriving, and took their temperatures.

"We ask all those who work in different services here at the beach, even state agents all must be behind the Health Department ... if it (Ebola) reaches your neighbor, it can also reach you," said Alphose Buka, a state

official working at the beach.

Health workers detained a woman who did not have a vaccination card.

Antho Buka, who sells meat and fish at the Wahi market at a port in Kinshasa said she was surprised residents in Kinshasa are worried about Ebola, since it is in the northwest Equateur Province.

"Our relatives in Mbandaka have informed us that Ebola is in Bikoro, but here in Kinshasa, we do not have recorded cases, not even."

Georgette Boluka also said that with all the teams going into Bikoro and the Equateur Province to fight Ebola, she hopes it will not spread.



In this May 22, 2018, photo, schoolchildren wash their hands to help contain the Ebola outbreak before entering a classroom in the north-western city of Mbandaka, in Congo. Congo's health ministry announced six new confirmed Ebola cases and two new suspected cases Tuesday as vaccinations entered a second day in an effort to contain the deadly virus in the city of more than 1

million. (Mark Naftalin/UNICEF via AP)

"From radios and televisions, we know that the so-called Ebola is out in a village, in Bikoro ... that is the epicenter and we know that doctors have been sent there," she said, adding that she is reassured that victims will be properly quarantined.

However, two infected patients who fled from an Ebola treatment center in Mbandaka, a Congo city of 1.2 million people, later died, Medecins Sans Frontieres said Wednesday.

Emergency coordinator for MSF, Henry Gray, said that "forced hospitalization is not the solution to this epidemic," and more community engagement is needed to prevent the spread of the deadly virus.

This is Congo's ninth Ebola outbreak since 1976, when the disease was first identified. The virus is initially transmitted to people from wild animals, including bats and monkeys. It is spread via contact with the bodily fluids of those infected, including the dead.

Dr. Peter Salama, WHO emergencies chief warned Wednesday that "The next few weeks will really tell if this outbreak is going to expand to urban areas or if we're going to be able to keep it under control."

Experts are following three separate chains of transmission, he said. One is associated with a funeral that took place near Bikoro, another with a [health](#) care facility in Iboko and experts are gathering data related to a church ceremony, he said.

WHO said it is also accelerating efforts with nine countries neighboring

Congo to try to prevent the Ebola outbreak from spreading to them.

WHO began vaccinations this week and is using a "ring vaccination" approach, targeting the contacts of people infected or suspected of infection and then the contacts of those people. More than 600 contacts have been identified, WHO said.

There is no specific treatment for Ebola. Symptoms include fever, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle pain and at times internal and external bleeding. The virus can be fatal in up to 90 percent of cases, depending on the strain.

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