

KINSHASA

By Vision Reporter
and Agencies

An Ebola outbreak in the DR Congo believed to have killed more than 90 people has been declared an international health emergency by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

There is no vaccine or specific treatment for the strain responsible for the current outbreak of the highly contagious haemorrhagic fever, which has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa in the last 50 years.

DEATHS

Ninety-one reported deaths are suspected to have been caused by the current outbreak, according to the latest figures released on Sunday by Congolese health minister Samuel-Roger Kamba.

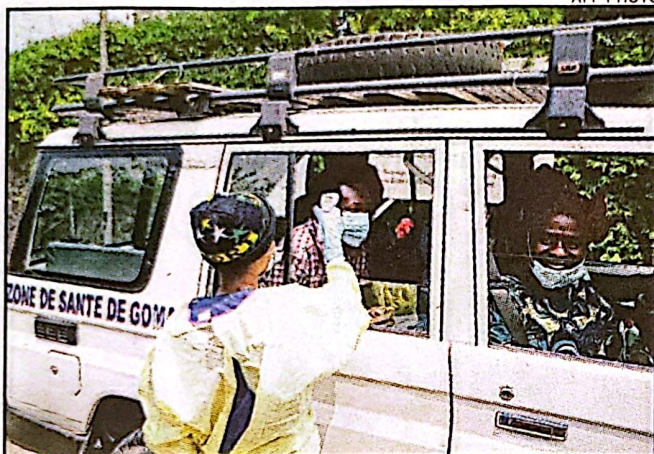
Around 350 suspected cases have been reported. Most of those affected are aged between 20 and 39 and more than 60% are women.

Few samples have been tested in a laboratory to date, and the reports are based mainly on suspected cases.

The centre of the outbreak is northeastern Ituri province,

NEW EBOLA OUTBREAK IN DRC: WHAT WE KNOW

AFP PHOTO



A visitor has their temperature checked by a health worker before entering Kyeshero Hospital, as part of Ebola prevention measures in Goma, yesterday

which borders Uganda and South Sudan. The gold-rich region sees intense daily population mobility linked to mining activities.

Violence by several armed groups also plagues some parts of the province, making access difficult for security reasons.

REGIONAL RISK

The virus has already spread beyond both Ituri province and

the DR Congo.

A case has been reported in Goma, a major city in eastern DR Congo under the control of the Rwanda-backed M23 anti-governmental group since early last year. The city is the capital of North Kivu province and neighbours Ituri.

A confirmed case and one death have also been recorded in Uganda, according to the Ugandan government. The

CALL FOR CALM IN UGANDA

Uganda's President, Yoweri Museveni, on Sunday called for calm after Uganda registered a second imported Ebola Bundibugyo virus disease case linked to the outbreak in eastern DRC that has so far claimed 88 people.

Museveni on Saturday met Uganda's national epidemics taskforce at Nakasero State Lodge following confirmation of Ebola involving Congolese nationals, who crossed into Uganda seeking specialised treatment.

"We discussed the Ebola situation in the region, and we will communicate the way forward. There is no cause for alarm," Museveni said in a statement posted on his official X account.

To prevent the spread of Ebola, according to Museveni, the annual Martyrs Day celebrations that had been slated for June 3, in Wakiso district have been postponed.

cases involve two Congolese who had travelled from the DR Congo. No local outbreak cluster has been reported.

Laboratory tests have confirmed a link with Ebola in all three cases.

The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC Africa) has warned of a high risk of spread to eastern African countries that border the DR Congo.

On Sunday, the WHO declared the outbreak a "public health

emergency of international concern" — the second-highest level of alert under international health regulations.

NO VACCINE

The current outbreak is caused by the Bundibugyo strain, for which no vaccine or specific treatment is available.

Steps to curb its spread rely on adherence to protective measures and detecting cases quickly to limit contact.

Existing vaccines against

Ebola are only effective for the Zaire strain of the virus, which is responsible for the largest recorded outbreaks.

The Bundibugyo strain has previously been responsible for two outbreaks — in Uganda in 2007 and in the DR Congo in 2012. The mortality rate was 30 to 50%.

MYSTICAL ILLNESS

Epidemiological investigations are underway to establish the origin of the outbreak.

The first identified case in the current outbreak was a nurse, who went to a health centre on April 24 in the city of Bunia, the capital of Ituri province. But the epicentre of the outbreak is about 90km away, in the health zone of Mongbwalu.

The WHO was alerted to the emergence of a high-mortality disease on May 5 after the deaths of, among others, four healthcare workers in four days in the area of Mongbwalu.

People infected by the Bundibugyo strain initially show symptoms similar to flu or malaria, which can delay detection.