

CDC supports WHO declaration of “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” for Ebola outbreak in eastern region of The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Press Release

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As cases of Ebola continue to increase in the eastern region of The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and travel-associated cases have been reported in neighboring Uganda, CDC fully supports the decision by the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee of the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare the outbreak a “public health emergency of international concern” (PHEIC). A PHEIC is declared if an extraordinary event poses a public health threat to other nations through the spread of disease and requires a more robust coordinated international response.

The declaration was made by WHO after the IHR Emergency Committee cited recent developments in the outbreak in making its recommendation, including the first confirmed case in Goma, a city of almost two million people in the DRC on the border with Rwanda and the gateway to the rest of DRC and the world. WHO cautioned against imposing trade or travel restrictions, which would have a negative impact on the response and on the lives and livelihoods of people in the region.

“Ending the Ebola outbreak is one of the Trump Administration’s top global health priorities,” said HHS Secretary Alex Azar. “We appreciate the strong response of Dr. Tedros and WHO leadership to this outbreak, yet it is clear that much more remains to be done. The United States government has already played a vital role in supporting the response in the DRC and neighboring nations, and will continue this support until we have put an end to the outbreak.”

“It is time for the world to take notice and redouble our efforts. We need to work together in solidarity with the DRC to end this outbreak and build a better health system,” said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Ph.D.

“Make no mistake, the challenges to stopping the Ebola outbreak are growing steeper and the public health response will unquestionably be longer,” said CDC Director Robert R. Redfield, M.D. “CDC stands ready to support our U.S. government and international partners in limiting the spread of Ebola, improving the human condition, and bringing this outbreak to an end.”

As part of the Administration's whole-of-government effort, CDC experts are working with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) on the ground in the DRC and the American Embassy in Kinshasa to support the Congolese and international response. The United States government, including CDC, is working with DRC, Uganda, WHO, and other partners to support the current Ebola outbreak response by providing technical assistance and expertise in disease tracking, case investigation, contact tracing, case management, infection prevention and control, safe burials, community engagement and social mobilization, risk communication and health education, behavioral science, laboratory testing, border health, data management, vaccination campaigns, and logistics.

To rapidly identify cases and prevent further spread of Ebola, CDC is working with the U.S. Embassy in DRC to reposition CDC staff in Goma to rapidly respond to hotspots where the security situation is permissible. As of July 16, 2019, CDC staff have conducted 311 deployments to the DRC, neighboring countries, and WHO headquarters. CDC has 246 permanent staff in the three high-risk countries bordering the outbreak (South Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda), including 43 in DRC. DRC has more than 150 graduates of CDC's [Field Epidemiology and Laboratory Training Program](#) who are playing a central role in this public health response.

CDC activated its [Emergency Operations Center \(EOC\)](#) on Thursday, June 13, 2019, to support the inter-agency response to the outbreak in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. CDC's activation of the EOC allows the agency to provide increased operational support for the response to meet the outbreak's evolving challenges.

There are no cases of Ebola in the United States. At this time, we believe the risk to the United States from the current Ebola outbreak in DRC remains low based on the travel volume and travel patterns from the outbreak area to the United States.

The outbreak in DRC is occurring in a region where there are armed conflict, outbreaks of violence, and other problems that complicate public health response activities and increase the risk of disease spread both locally within DRC and to neighboring countries. CDC continues to provide technical assistance to the ministries of health of DRC, Uganda, and other neighboring countries, in collaboration with the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa, the Department of State, the World Health Organization (WHO), and other local and international partners, to ensure the response is robust and well-coordinated and brings the outbreak to an end.

- For more information about the current outbreak in DRC: <https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/drc/2018-august.html>
- For more information about Ebola: <https://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/>
- For travel health information: <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/alert/ebola-democratic-republic-of-the-congo>;
<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/democratic-republic-of-congo>

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