WHO calls on international community to join urgent push to end outbreak

23 March 2019 Geneva/Brazzaville/Goma - As the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) approaches 1 000 cases amid increased violence, WHO reaffirmed its commitment both to ending the outbreak and working with the government and communities to build resilient health systems.

Since the outbreak was declared in August 2018 there have been 993 confirmed and probable cases and 621 deaths in North Kivu and Ituri provinces.

“We use words like ‘cases’ and ‘containment’ to be scientific, but behind every number is a person, a family and a community that is suffering,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “This outbreak has gone on far too long. We owe it to the people of North Kivu to work with them in solidarity not only to end this outbreak as soon as possible, but to build the health systems that address the many other health threats they face on a daily basis.”

More than 96 000 people have been vaccinated against Ebola in DRC, along with health workers in Uganda and South Sudan. As of 21 March, 38 of 130 affected health areas have active transmission. More than 44 million border screenings have helped to slow the spread of Ebola in this highly mobile population. No cases have spread beyond North Kivu and Ituri provinces, and no cases have crossed international borders.

However, the risk of national and regional spread remains very high, especially when episodes of violence and instability impact the response.

“As we mourn the lives lost, we must also recognize that thousands of people have been protected from this terrifying disease,” said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa. “We are working in exceptionally challenging circumstances, but thanks to support from donors and the efforts of the Ministry of Health, WHO and partners, we have saved thousands of lives.”

WHO has more than 700 people in DRC and is working hard with partners to listen to the affected communities and address their concerns and give them greater ownership of the response, particularly in the current outbreak hotspots of Katwa and Butembo.

“The communities affected by this outbreak are already traumatized by conflict,” said Dr Tedros. ”Their fear of violence is now compounded by fear of Ebola. Community engagement takes time. There are no quick fixes. But we are learning and adapting to the evolving context

every day."

Despite the challenges, most communities accept response interventions. More than 90% of those eligible for vaccination accept it and agree to post-vaccination follow-up visits. Independent analysis of vaccination data indicate that the vaccine is protecting at least 95% of those who receive it in a timely manner. More than 80% of people also accept safe and dignified burials, a key to preventing onward transmission.

"Despite the increased frequency of attacks by armed groups, WHO will stay the course and will work with communities to end this outbreak together with the Ministry of Health and partners," said Dr Tedros. "We need redoubled support from the international community, and a commitment to push together to bring this outbreak to an end."

For the next 6 months, the combined financial need for all response partners is at least $148 million. As of 19 March, $US 74 million had been received.

"We count on donors to help close the funding gap so we can end this outbreak as soon as possible," said Dr Tedros. "We will still be in DRC long after this outbreak has finished, working with the government and communities on the road to universal health coverage. We are committed to improving the health of the people of DRC now and in years to come."

https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/23-03-2019-who-reaffirms-commitment-to-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-as-ebola-outbreak-nears-1-000-cases-amid-increased-violence