



Jean-Jacques/Welthungerhilfe

# ONE YEAR WITH EBOLA—DR CONGO

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## Ebola Virus Epidemic

The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) has been present in eastern DR Congo since August 1, 2018. On July 17 2019, the epidemic was declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) due to its continued development and the first reported case in the city of Goma, which further increased the risk of regional spread. The virus continues to be concentrated in North Kivu, with the city of Beni remaining the epicentre of the epidemic.

This current epidemic is very complex as insecurity hinders public health response activities. Factors affecting the epidemic include population movements in densely populated areas, weak infection control and prevention practices in many health facilities, a complex political environment, persistent community reluctance, and a constant unstable security situation.

## Ebola Virus Disease

The Ebola Virus is a rare but serious, often fatal, disease that is transmitted to humans from wild animals and is transmitted through direct contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person.

In terms of prevention, it is important to avoid contact with blood and body fluids; items that may have been in contact with the body fluids of an infected person; funerals that require handling the body of a person who has died as a result of EVD; contact with the semen of a man with EVD (until it is known whether the virus has disappeared). Hand hygiene remains the most effective way to prevent the spread of the virus.

Symptoms of the virus include:



## Current Figures

As of 22 July 2019, just a few days before the first anniversary of the epidemic, the total number of cases stands at 2,592, thus 2,498 confirmed and 94 probable cases. The virus has also caused 1,649 deaths. But all hope is not lost as 729 infected people have been cured of the virus.

## Ebola in Goma

On July 14 2019, an infected case was identified and confirmed in the city of Goma. The patient was infected during a visit to the town of Butembo where he subsequently travelled to Goma. He was then transferred to an Ebola Treatment Centre (ETC) before being announced as deceased. Contact tracing was carried out by the health authorities where more than 75 contacts were vaccinated and followed up on, including co-travellers and family members.

The city of Goma is a densely populated area with more than one million inhabitants. 15,000 people cross the border between Goma and Rwanda every day, as Goma is an important centre of activity for economic exchanges with Rwanda. It is essential to continue to raise public awareness in order to promote good prevention practices and halt the spread of the epidemic.

## WHH Intervention

Welthungerhilfe (WHH), a German international NGO, has been a partner in the Ebola coordination response since February 2019. Since then, and with the support of the *German Federal Foreign Office*, the NGO has been implementing a prevention project focused on community mobilization. The project has conducted sensibilization sessions in primary schools in the health zones of Goma, Karisimbi, Nyiragongo and Rutshuru. To date, awareness sessions have been conducted in 202 schools with the help of a local project partner, Bon Dieu dans la Rue (BDrint), a national NGO. These sessions have generated a great deal of interest from the students, which allowed them to be involved in the prevention and to combat rumours and preconceived ideas about the disease. This activity has sensitized a total of 60,815 people, including students and teachers.

In addition, a total of 590 schools have received "image boxes", which enable them to replicate good practices. 200 handwashing kits were also distributed to 50 schools, reaching approximately 27,594 students. The distributions took place in early June 2019 and ongoing monitoring activities show that the handwashing kits are being well used in schools.

Furthermore, awareness campaigns have also been launched by the local radio station, Pole FM, which covers the 4 health zones of the project and is the most listened to station in and around Goma. In addition to short radio messages in three local languages broadcast in French, the radio also broadcasts interactive programs and a round table with community representatives and members of the Ebola response teams to increase the influence and impact of radio as a communication tool in the project.

The next phase of the project will focus on daily household visits for hygiene promotion and Ebola awareness conducted by 1,200 Community Animation Committees (CACs). The visits are aimed at strengthening community engagement to prevent the spread of Ebola in and around the city of Goma. These activities are in line with Strategic Response Plan No. 4, which has been defined by the Ministry of Health and covers the period from July to December 2019.



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