

[DR Congo: new cases of deadly Ebola virus, as UN steps up response](#)

In eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the UN has stepped up community-based efforts to tackle Ebola disease, following confirmation that the virus has reached the city of Butembo, near the Ugandan border, where it has claimed three lives.

On Friday, [WHO](#), the [World Health Organization](#), said that there were 137 confirmed and probable cases and 92 deaths in the latest outbreak in the east of the country.

[UN Children's Fund UNICEF](#), announced that "everything is being done" to ensure that the disease is controlled in Butembo "at this early stage".

Working with the communities, alerting them, informing them, and getting them to treat Ebola cases... is the challenge – *Christian Lindmeier, WHO*

Apart from widespread insecurity, one of the biggest challenges is overcoming communities' hostility to strict health directives, that go against centuries-old cultural traditions, including burial practices.

"I remember when I was going in West Africa a few years ago during the Ebola (outbreak) how dangerous it was to go to some villages," spokesperson Christophe Boulhierac said.

"We know, based on our experience and our work, that it should never be underestimated, this community resistance. And it's an incentive to work at a more deeper level," he added. "It's an incentive to understand more accurately what people feel and why...What are the cultural beliefs?"

He added that it was important to respond on that level, "using agents of change, using people who have some influence in the community."

Specialist help deployed in Ebola zone

In a bid to help protect communities, UNICEF has dispatched a team of 11 specialists in community communication, education and psycho-social assistance, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene. The UN agency is also working with anthropologists specializing in local cultural beliefs and practices to help overcome possible concerns.

"If we don't do that, this resistance can really increase and can really cause serious obstacles to the fight against the disease," Mr. Boulhierac said. "It's about knowing the people to whom we are talking."

More than 250 community leaders have also been alerted about the outbreak in Butembo, along with religious leaders and journalists. They have been told about prevention measures and an emergency number to call to treat anyone with Ebola-like symptoms.

The current Ebola outbreak in the Kivus region is DRC's 10th since 1976. It was officially declared on 1 August. More than 1,750 people are under active surveillance, according to World Health Organization, [WHO](#), and more than 52 vaccination "rings" have been set up around known Ebola patients.

"Working with the communities, alerting them, informing them, and getting them to treat Ebola cases or suspected Ebola cases in the right way, is the challenge," said WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier.

In total, more than 8,900 people have been vaccinated, including more than 2,000 children. Treating the sick and protecting people who have come into contact with them is complicated, because the vast Kivus area is home to more than 100 armed groups.

The last Ebola outbreak in DRC was some 2,000 miles away, to the west, in Equateur province, which includes the Congo River. It was declared over in July after claiming 33 lives.