

Ebola in DRC, one year on: UK calls on international community to step up

The UK is calling on other countries to provide more financial support and to work with the UN, the WHO and the government of the DRC to tackle Ebola in the region, one year after the outbreak began.

The UK is at the forefront of responding to the outbreak and has so far committed support including funding for a life-saving vaccine, vital work to engage communities and training for local health workers.

However, money alone will not fight this disease; over the past two weeks alone it has killed 100 people. A new Ebola case confirmed on 30 July in Goma city emphasises the risk of further spread, the need for better-supported communities and strengthened health services and effective preparedness. The UK has been clear that a truly international effort is needed to end the most challenging public health emergency in recent history.

International Development Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Ebola has already taken far too many lives in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Shockingly it has wiped out entire families and, a year after this outbreak started, it is showing no sign of slowing down.

The UK has led the way in tackling this killer disease and we can be proud of our support to create a life-saving Ebola vaccine which has inoculated 180,000 people so far.

Diseases like Ebola have no respect for borders. This could be spread beyond DRC. It is essential that the rest of the international community steps up to help. If we don't act now, many thousands more lives could be lost.

UK support has gone directly on:

- Vaccinating more than 180,000 people in the DRC, which has been shown to be 97% effective in at-risk people including health workers.
- Safe and dignified burials to allow families to bury loved ones without becoming infected themselves.
- Ebola screening at border posts including temperature checks for countries neighbouring DRC such as Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.
- Supporting the training and vaccinating of health workers in Uganda, where three people with Ebola were brought first to a UK aid-funded treatment centre. Preparedness and swift action prevented further infection.
- Supporting the training of health workers in Rwanda and vaccination planning and screening on Rwanda's borders.

- Helping to procure sanitation equipment in South Sudan.
- A specialist UK-funded humanitarian expert deployed to Burundi to support preparedness and coordinate UK support.

There have been more than 2,600 cases reported and 1,750 lives claimed since the outbreak. In the last six months, the number of cases has increased dramatically and conflict continues to prevent health workers from getting to those most in need.

During the 2014 outbreak in Sierra Leone, the global community worked together to stop the spread of Ebola and the country is now rebuilding itself. The UK is using knowledge learnt during the 2014 outbreak to strengthen our response in the DRC and to enable a community-led response.

This has seen awareness-raising and training developed with local communities, especially for women who are more likely to get the disease due to their role as primary carers. Indeed, many female survivors are caring for babies and young children whose parents are being treated for Ebola, and orphans whose parents have died from the virus.

The UK has already deployed experts from the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team (PHRST) to the DRC. Funded by UK aid through the Department of Health and Social Care, these have included epidemiologists and data scientists in eastern DRC, as well as support to the WHO in Geneva.

Notes to editors

1. Free-to-use video content is available to download here:
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1riV7sM9YmsSAbJkeLio4sWZBww8cxJ8k>
2. The UK is calling for a new, stronger approach to responding to the Ebola outbreak, including tackling the mistrust of communities, which have suffered decades of conflict, and in some cases do not believe Ebola is real.
3. The DRC outbreak is second in scale only to the West Africa outbreak of 2013 to 2016.
4. Public Health England considers the risk to the UK to be very low/negligible.
5. The UK continues to support partners on the ground including the WHO, UNICEF and the International Federation of Red Cross (IRFC) and Red Crescent Societies.