

Press release: UK aid helps end Ebola outbreak in Democratic Republic of the Congo – potentially preventing it “reaching our shores”

The Department for International Development (DFID), Public Health England (PHE) and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine have worked alongside the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Ministry of Health, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the UN mission MONUSCO, the Wellcome Trust, GAVI (the Vaccine Alliance) and others to halt the disease's spread.

Today, the DRC's Ministry of Health declared the end of the most recent outbreak of Ebola, while insisting it would remain on the alert and continue to prepare for future outbreaks.

DFID has provided funding to tackle the outbreak, including supplying vaccines, in the DRC.

UK aid also funded the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team, made up of three health experts who flew to the DRC to work as part of an international team fighting Ebola.

International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt said:

The UK's swift and robust response to the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo helped to stop it spreading to neighbouring countries, and ultimately to the UK. Our response shows how seriously we take such health threats around the world.

UK aid support and expertise were key to containing this deadly outbreak, helping to prevent a repeat of the widespread death toll from the 2014-15 West Africa epidemic. We have learned from this epidemic which resulted in Britons infected with the disease returning to the UK.

Our contributions are helping to limit the spread of Ebola and other deadly diseases, making the world – including the UK – a safer place.

In May, DFID provided £1m (in addition to £2m provided by the Wellcome Trust) to support key science and research elements of the Ebola response. This included support for the roll-out of an experimental Ebola vaccine, which was developed with support from UK aid funding following the 2014-15 West Africa Ebola outbreak. Later in the month DFID provided a package of support to the WHO to aid their response plan. This helped WHO and the DRC Ministry of Health to monitor the spread of the disease, identify and diagnose cases,

trace people at risk of infection, support its vaccination campaign, and treat the sick.

In July, DFID provided fresh support to WHO to ensure Ebola did not spread to any of DRC's neighbouring countries.

The UK Public Health Rapid Support Team, made up of two epidemiologists and a data scientist was sent to DRC in late May. Jointly delivered by Public Health England and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, the team worked under difficult conditions in a remote rainforest area. They helped develop an alert system for early warning of possible cases, assisted in the training and supervision of field teams, and tracked the spread of Ebola.

Dr Olivier le Polain, epidemiologist and member of the team, said:

Community surveillance strategies were put in place in remote villages, which were bolstered by teams undertaking active case finding. These teams were travelling to remote areas by motorbike, to ensure that suspect cases were identified, tested, and appropriately managed. Early identification and isolation of cases of Ebola Virus Disease are critical measures that limit onward community spread, and help contain the outbreak.

The focus of UK aid will now move towards preventing future outbreaks. Investing in health systems is important and good value for money, because it enhances the world's ability to prevent epidemics, rather than reacting to future crises. Evidence suggests that, for every £1 invested in preparation, a £2 return can be achieved in terms of savings on future spending and investments.

Summary of DFID's funding contribution to tackling Ebola in DRC

- On May 18, 2018, DFID announced it had provided £1 million, alongside £2 million to the Wellcome Trust from its joint research initiative on epidemic preparedness. This supported the science and research elements of the response, including evaluating the safety and effectiveness of the Ebola vaccine
- On May 23, DFID announced £5 million in funding from its Crisis Reserve Fund for the joint WHO-DRC Government Ebola response plan
- On July 3, DFID announced £1.5 million in support for the WHO's Regional Preparedness Plan, to support countries neighbouring DRC in preparing for and managing the risk of of Ebola spreading into their territory

Key statistics

- There were a total of 54 cases in this outbreak (38 confirmed and 16 probable). In total, 33 people died. (source Government of DRC Ministry of Health)
- 3,330 people were vaccinated by MSF and WHO teams
- 1,706 contacts of infected people were identified, registered, and followed-up with for a 21-day period following their possible exposure

(Ebola has a 21-day incubation period)

Calculating the end of the outbreak

- The DRC's Ministry of Health officially declared the Ebola outbreak over today, following technical guidance from WHO. This states that if no other cases are confirmed, the outbreak is over after two full incubation periods (21 days each) have passed, starting from the day after the last Ebola patient was released from care
- The last patient was released after having tested negative for the virus twice, on June 12. The 42-day period ended on July