

# **Ebola claims up to 32 lives in DR Congo: WHO (Update)**

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An outbreak of Ebola fever in the Democratic Republic of Congo may have claimed up to 32 lives since May, including that of a woman who had just given birth, the World Health Organisation said Tuesday.

By September 15, "a cumulative total of 72 cases was recorded, including 14 cases that were confirmed positive after laboratory analysis, 32 probable cases and 26 suspected cases, while 32 deaths were registered," the WHO announced in Kinshasa.

On Saturday, a baby born prematurely in the isolation centre in Isiro—the epicentre of the epidemic in northeastern DR Congo—to a mother infected by the Ebola virus was still alive while his mother died, the statement said.

In DR Congo, which has known eight outbreaks of the often fatal haemorrhagic fever, it was the first time a pregnant woman had a child, because "Ebola and pregnancy are almost incompatible", Health Minister Felix Kabange Numbi said.

To date, there is no treatment nor vaccine for Ebola, which kills between 25 percent and 90 percent of patients depending on the strain of the virus.

The disease is transmitted by direct contact with blood, faeces and sweat, by sexual contact, and by unprotected handling of contaminated corpses.

According to the WHO, 23 health workers were among the infected people. Five of them died, and 215 people who have been in contact with the sick are under surveillance. The most recent confirmed case of Ebola dates from Friday.

An epidemic was declared in mid-August in Orientale province, but the international committee for the fight against Ebola has carried out research and dated the outbreak back to May.

"Today, an analysis of the situation shows that the epidemic seems to be confined to its epicentre at Isiro and there have been no more cases of infection among health personnel," the WHO representative in Kinshasa, Leodegal Bazira, told AFP.

"This shows that measures to keep the infection in check are beginning to bear fruit. These measures need to be strengthened and sustained until the epidemic is declared over to prevent it spreading," he added.

Dr Bazira warned that Ebola can become "an international public health emergency if it is not rapidly contained."

The United Nations has launched an appeal for \$2 million (1.53 million euros) to help fight the disease.

The ministry of health, the WHO, the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, and Doctors Without Borders (MSF - Medecins Sans Frontieres) are working in close collaboration to combat the outbreak.

In Geneva, the WHO stated that an investigation was under way into all possible channels of the disease's transmission and to make sure all appropriate steps had been taken to keep it in check.

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