

WHO plans urgent yellow fever vaccinations in Angola, Congo

June 23 2016, by Krista Larson

The World Health Organization is planning emergency vaccination campaigns along the border between Angola and Congo amid the worst yellow fever outbreak in decades that already is blamed for more than 400 deaths, health officials said Thursday.

The vaccination efforts next month also will focus on the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, where experts fear the disease could quickly spread in congested neighborhoods. The outbreak has led to cases in Kenya and China as well, via travelers.

"While WHO is working with partners and vaccine manufacturers to increase vaccine production and replenish the emergency stockpile currently being used for this outbreak, it is vital to interrupt transmission, especially in cross-border areas to rapidly bring this outbreak under control and halt further international spread," said Dr. Matshidiso Moeti, WHO's regional director for Africa.

Among the more than 4,000 suspected cases, there have been 347 deaths in Angola and 75 in Congo since December.

Yellow fever is spread mostly by mosquitos, and it is common in many tropical parts of Africa and Central and South America. WHO estimates about 15 percent of people who are exposed develop fever and jaundice.

The death rate is as high as 50 percent in people with severe symptoms such as kidney complications.

The emergency yellow fever vaccine stockpile has already been depleted twice this year since February, and it can take up to a year to produce more of the vaccine.

WHO says it plans to spend more than \$72 million to combat yellow fever, \$60 million of it for vaccination efforts.

The epidemic comes as WHO struggles to combat the Zika virus epidemic and as it tries to demonstrate it has learned from its mistakes that contributed to the more than 11,000 deaths in West Africa caused by the worst Ebola epidemic in history.

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