

WHO: 400 contacts being traced in Congo's Ebola outbreak

May 18 2017, by Krista Larson

Health workers are monitoring more than 400 people amid an Ebola outbreak in a remote corner of Congo where already three deaths have been blamed on the virus, the World Health Organization said Thursday.

An experimental vaccine has been developed since the West African epidemic in 2014-2016 that left more than 11,000 people dead, but WHO said it is still awaiting permission from the Congolese government to use it.

The Ebola outbreak in the far north near the border with Central African Republic is the eighth in Congo since 1976. Congo has a long track record with the hemorrhagic fever, WHO said.

"However, we cannot underestimate the logistical and practical challenges associated with this response in a very remote, insecure part of the country," said Dr. Peter Salama, executive director of WHO's health emergencies program.

"We've also learned never, ever to underestimate the Ebola virus disease."

Authorities believe three deaths are linked to the outbreak: a 39-year-old man who died before he could reach a hospital, the motorcyclist transporting him and a caregiver traveling with them.

So far just two cases have been confirmed by laboratory testing. There

are 18 other suspected cases.

The outbreak in Likati is some 1,400 kilometers (870 miles) from Congo's capital, Kinshasa. Helicopters and small aircraft are carrying teams to the remote area, where they are setting up a mobile testing laboratory and making improvements to the local airstrip.

Because the Ebola vaccine is still considered experimental, Congo's government must give special permission for it to be used. WHO is still awaiting such confirmation, at which point it could take about a week to ship the vaccines to Congo and have teams ready to carry it out.

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