

Rumors, conflict challenge Ebola response in eastern Congo

September 19 2018, by Jamey Keaten



The Ebola virus, isolated in November 2014 from patient blood samples obtained in Mali. The virus was isolated on Vero cells in a BSL-4 suite at Rocky Mountain Laboratories. Credit: NIAID

The latest Ebola outbreak in Congo presents complex challenges as the virus spreads for the first time in an area where long-running conflict is

hampering aid efforts, the regional Africa chief for the International Federation of the Red Cross said Wednesday.

Red Cross teams have resorted to training civil protection volunteers who enter "no-go areas" to carry out safe and dignified burials, a fundamental technique to limit Ebola's spread, Dr. Fatoumata Nafo-Traore told The Associated Press in an interview.

Her teams at times limit working hours to reduce security risks after dark, she said, and the dangers are an "important impediment" to aid operations.

"It has really reduced our access in communities because we can't go everywhere," she said. She pointed to Congo's previous Ebola [outbreak](#) earlier this year in the northwest. "If you compare the situation in the Equateur zone, where we had the ninth Ebola outbreak, the operation was much easier because we were operating in a much more secure environment."

The World Health Organization, which like the IFRC is based in Geneva, as of Monday had counted 111 confirmed Ebola cases since the outbreak of the hemorrhagic fever was declared in North Kivu province on Aug. 1, including 66 deaths.

"Transmission is continuing, but it's a slow transmission," Nafo-Traore said. "It's a complex operation because of the insecurity in the region, because of the difficult access, and also because of the behavior of the population in the affected areas."

As often when Ebola enters a new area, alarm and suspicion of outsiders have presented challenges.

Rumor confounds aid workers' efforts. The Red Cross has noted several:

It's a plot to influence voters before Congo's December elections; health workers can't be trusted; the disease doesn't exist; aid groups are out to make money or dupe people.

"Some are thinking that the Ebola response is a scam," Nafo-Traore said.

"There are many types of rumors and we need to know about this to reorganize ourselves to convince them (that they are) fake news," she added.

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