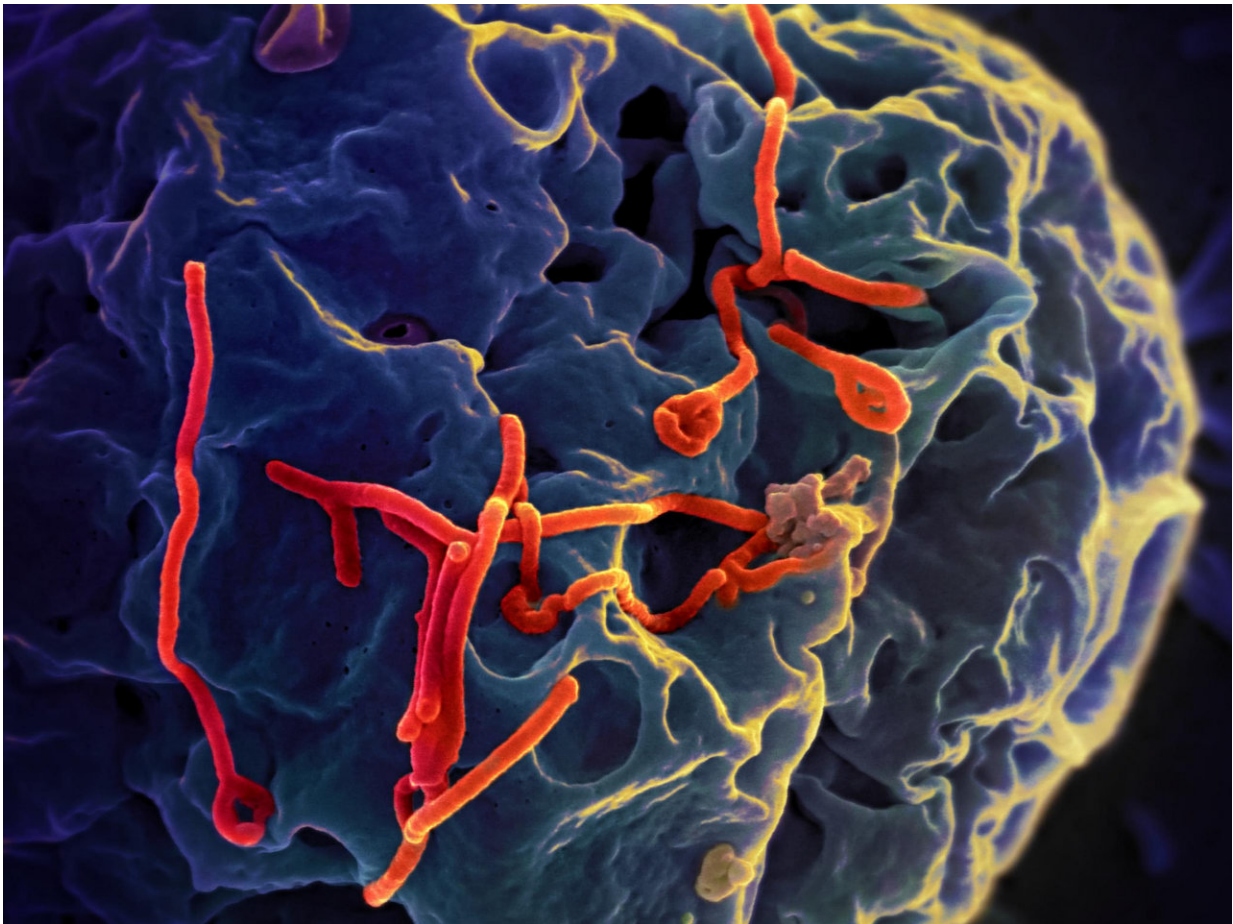


Attacks could reverse gains in Congo's Ebola fight, WHO says

March 14 2019, by Jamey Keaten And Krista Larson



Ebola virus particles (red) on a larger cell. Credit: NIAID

Attacks on Ebola treatment centers in eastern Congo threaten to reverse

the gains being made against the current outbreak of the deadly virus, the World Health Organization's director-general said Thursday as a fourth attack on a health center was reported.

Nearly 600 people have died from Ebola in the volatile region, making it the second most deadly in history.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who has just returned from a visit to the affected areas in Congo, insisted that efforts to contain Ebola are succeeding. He said the WHO hopes the outbreak will be ended in the next six months.

His optimistic assessment starkly contrasted to one offered last week by the head of Doctors Without Borders, which pulled out of two Ebola centers following attacks. Eastern Congo is home to a myriad of armed groups, and the epidemic has deepened the political and economic grievances of many in the area.

Doctors Without Borders said over the last several weeks some 43 percent of new cases in the epicenter towns of Katwa and Butembo had no known links to other cases. That means the vigorous efforts to track the contacts of the sick are not entirely successful.

And more than 40 percent of the deaths are still taking place in communities rather than at Ebola treatment centers. The bodies of victims are highly contagious, and the aid group said that figure shows community mistrust is still widespread.

Tedros told journalists in Geneva that a much larger crisis has been averted: Ebola has been contained to eastern Congo without spreading across the massive Central African nation or crossing borders into neighboring countries.

"Despite the incredibly difficult situation the outbreak has been contained in 11 out of the 20 communities that have had cases," Tedros said.

"You cannot say it's failing when the outbreak is contracting," he added.

Doctors Without Borders described conditions at the epicenter in Congo as "toxic," saying that government security forces were complicating the effort by trying to force people into treatment centers.

Amid the backlash against the Ebola response, four health centers have been attacked.

One person was killed and another wounded on Thursday in an attack on an Ebola health center, according to Richard Nyembo, a local administrator for Lubero province. The violence erupted in Mamboa, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) from Butembo. The attackers targeted an Ebola transit center, where suspected cases are evaluated and then referred to treatment centers.

Congo has seen periodic outbreaks of the Ebola virus since it was first identified in 1976.

At least 584 people have died among the 927 confirmed and probable cases in this outbreak.

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