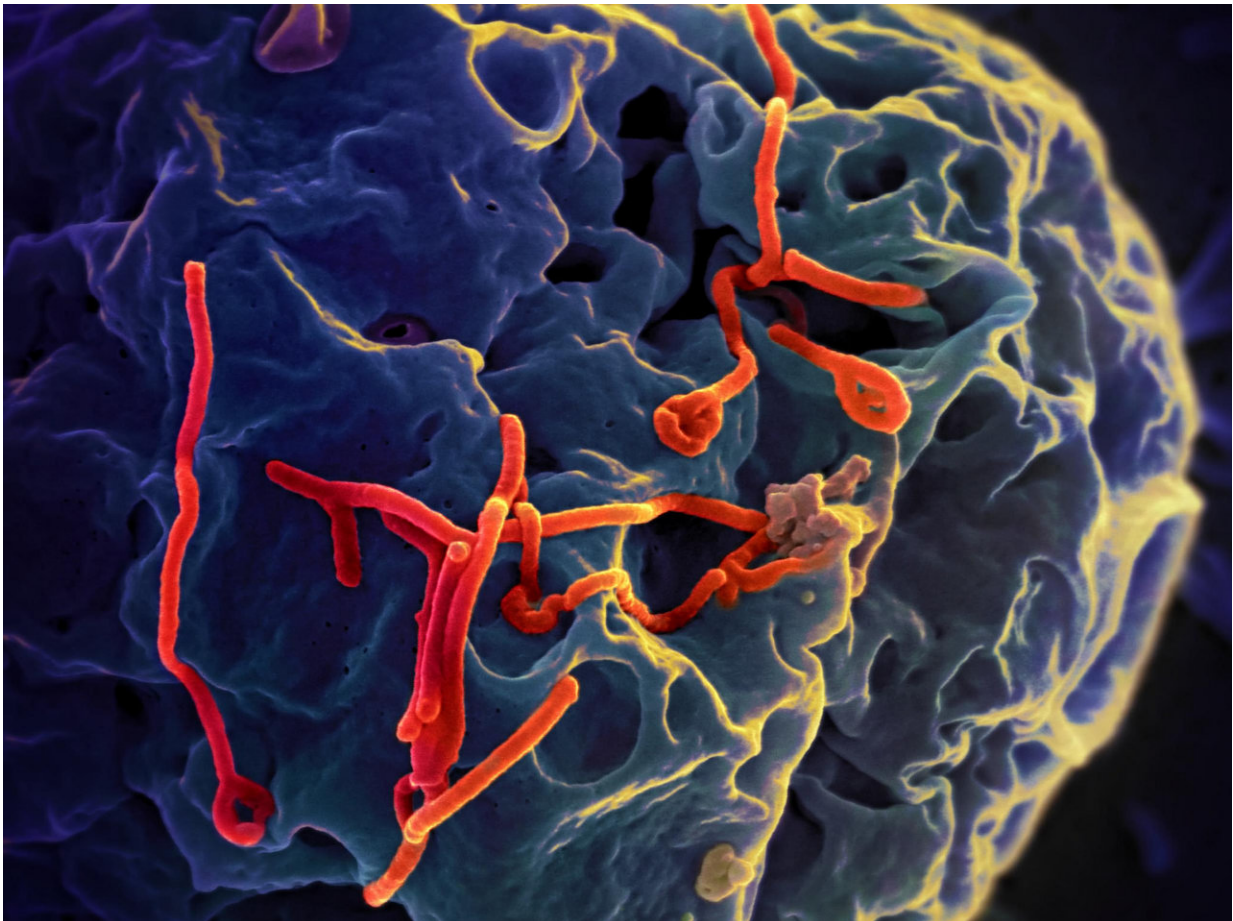


# Boy dies of Ebola in Uganda as virus spreads from DR Congo

June 12 2019

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

A five-year-old boy in Uganda has died of Ebola, the health minister told

AFP Wednesday, as his grandmother and younger brother also tested positive for the virus after the family visited relatives in epidemic-hit neighbouring DR Congo.

Health Minister Ruth Aceng confirmed Uganda had recorded three cases of Ebola infection, the first known cross-border spread since an outbreak began in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) last August.

More than 2,000 cases have been recorded in DRC—around two-thirds of them fatal.

The World Health Organization announced an emergency committee would meet Friday to determine whether to upgrade its assessment of the situation to "a public health emergency of international concern", having held off previously because the outbreak was contained to one part of DRC.

Uganda's health ministry confirmed Wednesday that a child had died from the virus, and that his three-year-old brother and their grandmother were also infected.

"We have three cases of Ebola confirmed. Unfortunately, we lost the boy who was first tested and was found positive," Aceng said, adding eight other people who had been in contact with the family were being monitored in an "isolation ward."

The health ministry said a woman of Congolese origin, who is married to a Ugandan, had gone to the DRC with her mother, two children and one other family member to take care of her father, who later died from Ebola.

Upon their return to Uganda, the five-year-old was vomiting blood and taken to hospital.

Lab tests revealed he had contracted the haemorrhagic virus and the family were quarantined, Aceng said.

The five-year-old was buried late Wednesday in Kasese district, in Uganda's west, health ministry spokeswoman Emma Ainebyoona told AFP.

They, and frontline health workers, are due to be vaccinated Friday with a new drug designed to protect them against the virus.

## **High alert**

While they were still in the DRC, the family were identified as having been in contact with an Ebola patient and placed under quarantine, Congolese Health Minister Oly Ilunga Kalenga said.

But they left the isolation ward and crossed into Uganda, he added.

"As soon as they crossed, we contacted the Ugandan authorities," he told AFP in an interview Wednesday.

East Africa has been on high alert since the outbreak was declared in the eastern DRC provinces of North Kivu and Ituri last August.

According to the WHO, Uganda has vaccinated nearly 4,700 health workers in 165 facilities.

Uganda has experienced several outbreaks in the past, most recently in 2012, while in 2000 more than 200 people died in an outbreak in the north of the country.

South Sudan has also declared a state of alert and vaccinated health workers.

The Red Cross said it was scaling up efforts to contain the spread of the virus since it was detected in Uganda.

"This is a worrying development, but we have been preparing for this day for months now," Robert Kwesiga, Uganda Red Cross Secretary General, said in a statement Wednesday.

The United States pledged to continue providing assistance to Uganda, saying it had full confidence in the government's ability to respond to the outbreak.

## **Emergency summit**

Efforts to tackle the crisis in DRC have been hampered both by militia attacks on treatment centres and by the hostility of some local people to the medical teams.

Five workers have been killed, according to an AFP tally, and important preventative work, such as vaccination programmes and burials of Ebola victims, has been delayed.

But the WHO, in October and again in April, held off declaring the DRC epidemic an emergency of international concern.

For the committee to make the emergency call, it must determine that the epidemic "carries implications for public health beyond the affected State's national border and may require immediate international action".

If such a declaration is made Friday it will represent a major shift in mobilisation against the disease.

The outbreak is the 10th in the DRC since the disease was identified in 1976.

It is the worst on record after an epidemic that struck Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone between 2014-2016, leaving more than 11,300 people dead.

Ebola is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads among humans through close contact with the blood, body fluids, secretions or organs of an infected person.

The virus's "reservoir", or haven in the wild, is believed to be a fruit bat native to tropical Africa.

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