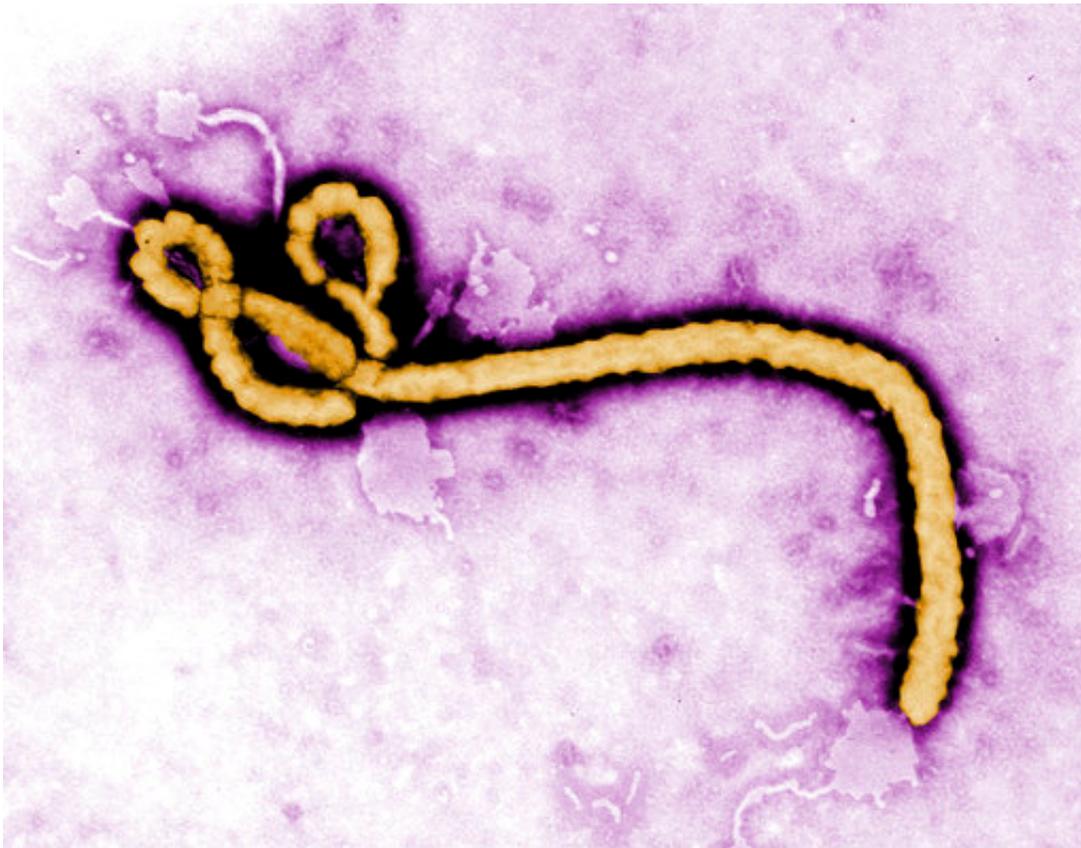


Congo announces 9 suspected Ebola cases, including 3 deaths

May 12 2017, by Saleh Mwanamilongo



In this undated colorized transmission electron micrograph file image made available by the CDC shows an Ebola virus virion. Health authorities are investigating nine suspected cases of Ebola in a remote corner of northern Congo, including two deaths, the country's health minister said Friday May 12, 2017. (Frederick Murphy/CDC via AP, File)

One person has been confirmed dead from Ebola in an outbreak in a remote corner of northern Congo as health authorities look into a total of nine suspected cases, including two other deaths, the country's health minister and the World Health Organization said Friday.

One case of the hemorrhagic fever was confirmed out of the five tested since the outbreak emerged April 22 in Bas-Uele province, Health Minister Oly Ilunga Kalenga said. He said the confirmed case was of the Zaire strain of the virus.

The outbreak could test a recently developed experimental Ebola vaccine that WHO says could be used in emergencies. The global vaccine alliance GAVI said 300,000 doses are available "if needed to stop this outbreak becoming a pandemic."

This vast, impoverished Central African nation has had seven known Ebola outbreaks in the past, including one in 2014 with several dozen cases. That outbreak was not connected to the massive epidemic in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone that left thousands dead.

So far all the cases have been tied to a remote village, and it's a strain of Ebola that's been seen in the country before.

Dr. Allarangar Yokouide, the WHO representative in Congo, said the first teams of specialists should arrive in the affected area of Likati on Friday or Saturday. The zone is some 1,300 kilometers (800 miles) from the capital, Kinshasa.

"The area in Likati is difficult to access, but the work of tracing contacts is very crucial to stopping the epidemic in its tracks," he said. The community is near the border with Central African Republic.

Ebola occasionally jumps to humans from animals including bats and

monkeys. Without preventive measures, the virus can spread quickly between people and is fatal in up to 90 percent of cases. There is no specific treatment for the disease.

The new cluster of Ebola cases will again test one of the world's least equipped health systems. The U.S. Agency for International Development has said an estimated 70 percent of the population has little or no access to health care.

"We urge you not to give in to panic," Congo's health minister said.

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