

# Ebola still an 'urgent' global health emergency: WHO

18 October 2019

The deadly Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains an "urgent" global health emergency, The World Health Organization (WHO) said Friday at its Emergency Committee meeting.

DRC's latest Ebola epidemic, which began in August 2018, has killed 2,144 people, making it the second deadliest outbreak of the virus, after the West Africa pandemic of 2014-2016.

"The public [health](#) emergency will be maintained for an additional three months", WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at a press conference.

"This outbreak remains a complex and dangerous outbreak," he said, deploring the lack of funding.

The status of a global health emergency is an exceptional measure that has been used by the WHO four times: in 2009 for the Swine flu virus, in 2014 for polio, in 2014 for the Ebola epidemic which killed more than 11,000 in Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and in 2016 for the Zika virus.

Last week, the director of the WHO Emergency Program, Michael Ryan, expressed "cautious optimism" that the epidemic was confined to a smaller region.

The DRC health ministry said earlier this week Ebola had returned to Ituri province in the north-east of the country after nearly 300 days without any new cases.

"The number of cases has declined each week for the past four weeks. But these encouraging trends should be interpreted with caution," Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

"The area is a very complex area, it's a very volatile area. We have made very significant progress, the number of cases have plummeted.

"But if there is insecurity incidents, we may lose what we have gained so far."

Since the most recent Ebola outbreak, a vaccine developed by Merck Sharp and Dohme has been used on more than 230,000 people.

On Friday, the vaccine which has yet to be licensed, received a green light from The European Medicines Agency (EMA) in a step towards its commercialisation.

A second experimental vaccine manufactured by the Belgian subsidiary of Johnson & Johnson is to be introduced in November, according to DR Congo medical officials.

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