

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

GABON AND THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO: EBOLA OUTBREAK

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Information Bulletin N° 2

Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: CHF 50,000

This second Information Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. Based on further updates and details from assessments, or should the situation deteriorate, the Federation will consider a request for further support to the national societies through an international appeal. Unearmarked funds are needed to replenish the DREF.

The Disaster

According to the latest reports from the World Health Organisation (WHO), the ebola haemorrhagic fever is now confirmed to have affected over 30 people, of which 12 are in the Republic of Congo. The death toll is now close to 23 people, and 191 people are reported to have come in contact with those infected.

The virus is one of the deadliest known, causing the death of those infected in 50 to 90 percent of cases.

The ebola outbreak which affected Gabon's region of l'Ogooué-Ivindo (in the Department of Zadié) in late November seemed to have been contained. There has been only one death since the launch of the emergency response operation -- that of a child whose mother had received treatment (the mother had fled the Congo with her child in search of treatment by a traditional healer). All the initial infection centres have been contained, those who have come into contact with the disease have been placed under observation and the last patients are receiving treatment.



Recent events

During the holiday period some people came into contact with infected cases who had moved from the initial areas of infection to Etakangay and Ekata (close to Mekambo) and Libreville, increasing the total number of Ebola cases. This new outbreak of the virus has not been contained due to the inefficiency of the security belt established by the Gabonese Ministry of Health and of the behaviour of families who refuse to transport affected family members to hospitals and refuse to receive the medical team. The population in the affected areas has demonstrated their preference to Red Cross intervention than other organizations.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Heightening community awareness

In cooperation with and support from the Gabonese Ministry of Health coordination committees, a Red Cross and Federation coordination team has been organized, made up of: the Gabonese Red Cross (GRC) vice-president, a physician and coordinator of the GRC operation, the GRC national relief director, 2 first-aid monitors who are GRC trainers, a Federation medical consultant and Red Cross ebola specialist, and a regional resource person from DR Congo Red Cross in charge of information and reporting. The team has been involved in providing the local committees of affected areas with technical expertise and support to mobilize volunteers involved in heightening community awareness.



Serge Koumba from the Gabonese Red Cross passes messages on Ebola prevention to the communities of Ntolo and Ilahonene.

In Makoko (Gabon), the following activities have been organized:

- 24 volunteers have been trained by the coordination team and are working directly with the population. The training is provided by a national trainer backed by a Federation specialist. All families in the area have been informed and mop-up activities were carried out on 26 December until 3 a.m.
- the GRC and Federation team contacted the coordination committee, then trained 30 volunteers. WHO and UNICEF representatives and those of other agencies working in the field took part in the training and were greatly impressed by the content of the module. Immediately following the training, the volunteers provided information to the population. In this region, tension existed between the Ministry of Health coordination team and the population in the context of legislative elections. The population had set up barricades and did not want to receive the coordination committee members. Thanks to the quality of the volunteers' activities, confidence was restored between the authorities and the population and the epidemic was prevented from expanding on a large scale.

In Boué: 15 volunteers were trained together with health agents. The training is part of the preventive strategy. The volunteers will serve as a conduit between the health centre and population while at the same time acting as sentries to provide an early warning should the epidemic spread to the village.

In Ntolo, the entire population attended the dead child's funeral, prompting fears of fresh cases in the days to come. The village has been placed under surveillance and the community made aware of the first signs of the disease.

Psychological, social support and training - The Red Cross provided families who either had lost members, cured patients, or had patients under medical observation with a kit containing food and non-food items, and the volunteers provided the victims with psychological support.

The national society's initial action plan is being updated in order to incorporate the lessons learned in the field in the past week. Training will take place to improve the link between the field and the national headquarters. A strategy will be established by which the members of the GRC national coordination will rotate. For one month, the trainers will rotate among the epidemic centres to back up the volunteers' awareness activities and strengthen the local branches.

Indicators of the operation's success - Joint action by a number of partners made it possible to take rapid and vigorous action in response to the epidemic. Following about a dozen deaths at the beginning of the epidemic, only one death has been recently recorded. Among other achievements, are:

- All the centres of infection have been covered: the patients are being cared for, those who have come into contact with the disease placed under surveillance and the population informed.
- Health personnel have been trained and know that they can count on the Red Cross volunteers to heighten community awareness.
- Volunteers have been trained to recognize the first signs of the disease and can therefore safely ensure epidemiological surveillance with the backing of the health centres and under the supervision of their trainers.
- The communities have improved their knowledge of the disease and are more aware. A headquarters supervision and coordination team has been established.

Future activities

In the second week of January the regional health resource person, dispatched to reinforce the national society and the medical specialist, will organize a meeting of the region's Red Cross health officials in the form of a workshop on the lessons to be drawn from the epidemic and the preventive action to be carried out by the national society. The GRC, being a new national society with some institutional and operational weaknesses, needs the support of the regional delegation. The regional health delegate will therefore be assigned to Libreville in order to coach the national society team in volunteer management and monitoring activities. The volunteers will be used for social mobilization and to convince people to accept and cooperate with medical services.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

For further details please contact: Terry Carney, Phone 41 22 730 4298; Fax 41 22 733 0395; email: carney@ifrc.org

All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Head, a.i.
Relationship Management Department

Bekele Geleta
Head
Africa Department