

DR CONGO

EPIDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Communities at the heart of our work

Epidemics begin and end in communities. When communities are engaged and trained in epidemic preparedness and response, they can stop outbreaks and ultimately save lives.

Early detection, early action

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) is currently facing several complex health crises, including the world's largest measles outbreak and the largest Ebola outbreak in the country's history. The country is also prone to other infectious disease including diarrhoea, chikungunya, yellow fever and polio. Weak public health and sanitation systems, insecurity as well as challenges in accessing vulnerable communities in remote areas hamper people's access to adequate health care.

DR Congo Red Cross, with support from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and funding from USAID, has been helping communities prepare and prevent the spread of diseases. Focusing in Kinshasa and Kongo Centrale, DR Congo Red Cross is working with governments, communities, local responders and humanitarian partners to collectively prepare for and respond to epidemics.

Through its extensive network of local volunteers, DR Congo Red Cross is providing critical information, community-based referrals in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock to help stop diseases from spreading before an outbreak occurs.



■ Programme focus areas

6,000+

people have died from measles since the beginning of 2019. This is the world's largest measles outbreak.

44,000

households reached with critical health messaging in 2019.

300+

volunteers trained in epidemic control, community-based health and first aid.



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OUR WORK



Preparing communities

We are ensuring communities have critical information about the spread of diseases and how to prevent them, systems to detect outbreaks and mechanisms that ensure information sharing and community engagement. Activities include:

- Engaging communities through house-to-house visits, school clubs and group discussions.
- Strengthening community-based referral systems.
- Engaging, training and collaborating with community influencers, such as teachers, leaders and traditional healers.



Preparing first responders

DR Congo Red Cross has more than 160,000 volunteers across the country which gives extraordinary reach into communities. In their supporting role to the government, they are often central to emergency responses amid outbreaks. Activities include:

- Contingency planning with government and key partners.
- Strengthening systems to enable a fast, scaled-up response.
- Strengthening partnerships with different sectors and ministries.
- Training and readying community-based volunteers.
- Strengthening infection prevention and control in Red Cross health facilities.



Preparing stakeholders

Epidemics not only threaten lives but all aspects of society, including trade, transportation and education. We work with a variety of key stakeholders and the media in epidemic preparedness and response. Activities include:

- Helping prepare a variety of sectors to respond (including those affected by both animal and human health).
- Mapping critical data to help responders make informed decisions when a health crisis hits.
- Training media to communicate lifesaving information to affected populations.



Using the power of data to respond to measles

Red Cross is working with the government in DR Congo to ensure more families get vaccinated, through the power of data. Red Cross mapped critical data to mobilize volunteers and target areas where families had not yet been vaccinated. With the data, DR Congo Red Cross was also able to engage families who were hesitant or refusing to go to vaccination points due to myths and misconceptions about the vaccine.

“
Once we came in, we talked to them about the symptoms and what they need to do. This helps them prevent catching the disease.”

Msanto, Volunteer, DR Congo Red Cross

More information: <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/community-epidemic-pandemic-preparedness>

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