

# DR CONGO

## EPIDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

### Communities at the heart of our work

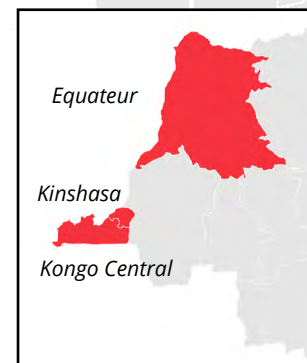
Epidemics begin and end in communities. When communities are engaged and trained in epidemic preparedness and response, they can stop outbreaks and ultimately save lives.

### Early detection, early action

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to face several complex health crises. It experienced the world's largest measles outbreak and seven Ebola outbreaks from 2018 to 2020. The country is also prone to other infectious diseases such as cholera, chikungunya, yellow fever and polio. Weak public health and sanitation systems, insecurity and difficulties of access to vulnerable communities in remote areas hamper access to adequate health care for the population.

The DRC Red Cross, with support from the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and funding from USAID, has been helping communities prepare and prevent the spread of diseases in the provinces of Kinshasa and Kongo Central since 2018. Since 2023, the programme is expanding its activities to the Equateur province. The DRC Red Cross is working with the government, communities, local stakeholders and humanitarian partners to collectively prepare for and respond to epidemics.

Through an extensive network of community volunteers, the DRC Red Cross is providing essential information and referrals, in coordination with the Ministries of Health, Agriculture and Fisheries and Livestock to help stop diseases from spreading before an outbreak occurs.



■ Programme focus areas

**1,271**

children who had missed out on vaccination recovered from January 2020 to December 2022.

**537,075**

households reached by prevention campaigns for diseases of epidemic potential from January 2019 to December 2022.

**330**

volunteers trained in epidemic preparedness and response, from January 2019 to December 2022.

## 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:

- Community education through door-to-door visits, activities in schools and group discussions.
- Strengthening community health referral systems.
- Engaging, training and collaborating with influential people in the community, such as teachers, chiefs and traditional healers.



### Preparing first responders

The DRC Red Cross has over 160,000 volunteers across the country, giving it extraordinary reach and privileged access at the community level. In their role of supporting the government, they are often central to emergency responses amid outbreaks.

Activities include:

- Developing a multi-hazard response plan with government and key partners.
- Strengthening infection prevention and control in Red Cross health facilities.
- Training and preparedness of volunteers and staff.



### 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 to prepare for and respond to outbreaks.

Activities include:

- Strengthening the capacity of One Health partners to respond to epidemics.
- Collecting critical data to support decision-making on epidemic risk management.
- Training the media and first responders in crisis communication.



### Preparedness reduces the impact of cholera in Lufu

The DRC Red Cross is supporting the government's efforts to fight cholera in the town of Lufu Frontière and its surroundings. As part of this support, and in preparation for future outbreaks, the Red Cross has trained 330 volunteers in epidemic preparedness and response.

In addition, the Red Cross trained 80 volunteers in water, sanitation and hygiene and distributed over 28,000 water purification tablets. More than 3,500 households in and around the city were sensitised and 10 wells and boreholes were disinfected. These activities have contributed to a significant decrease in cholera-related deaths in the locality. Only 8 deaths were recorded during the cholera outbreak that followed the implementation of activities in Lufu, while 29 deaths were recorded in 2019.

In addition, during its intervention, the Red Cross mapped the area and mobilized its volunteers to target areas at risk. The mapping strengthened the implementation strategy for cholera awareness and control activities.