



By: TA | AP Brief

Attacks on health facilities and workers limit Ebola response in Congo



At least a dozen attacks on health facilities and workers have been recorded during Congo's **Ebola outbreak** as safety fears restrict the response in the worst-affected region, authorities said Saturday.

Many **health workers** and other frontline workers in Ituri province have also gone on strike over unpaid salaries, further complicating response efforts in what's been declared the **fastest-growing Ebola outbreak** on record. So far 2,181 cases have been recorded, including 864 deaths.

The **Bundibugyo virus** responsible for this outbreak is less common than others that cause Ebola disease, and there is no approved vaccine or treatment.

Many of the attacks have been carried out by angry mobs who have stormed treatment centers or targeted response teams in the field, Pierre Akilimali, incident manager for the Ebola response, said at a press briefing in Bunia, the capital of Ituri.

The attacks are not limited to healthcare teams and affect frontline workers like burial teams, according to Dr. Adelard Lufongola, operations manager for the Ebola response.

"Members of the various response teams have been held captive in some health zones. Teams responsible for safe and dignified burials have been threatened and continue to be threatened in some cemeteries and within several communities," Lufongola said at the briefing.

Ebola spreads in the human population through contact with bodily fluids such as vomit, blood or semen, and with contaminated surfaces and materials.

Risks of transmission amid the chaos

Traditional funerals in which loved ones wash and prepare bodies have been restricted, which has angered some residents.

In Ituri, which accounts for around 90% of all cases, health and aid workers have been seen leaving remote communities considered hot spots and heading to Bunia in recent days, locals told The Associated Press.

U.N. spokesman Stéphane Dujarric on Thursday told reporters that humanitarian actors are "deeply concerned by escalating violence" impacting the Ebola response and that access to treatment centers and surrounding communities remains constrained.

I fear that the aid workers involved in combating this Ebola outbreak are going to leave the area – Christophe Munyanderu

"The worsening security situation has forced several humanitarian partners involved in the Ebola response to temporarily relocate staff to Bunia which is relatively safer," he said.

The most recent attack recorded was on Wednesday, when residents in the town of Nyakunde attacked a hospital and touched an Ebola treatment center nearby.

Officials said treatment and care resumed on Thursday at the center after its occupants, including some patients, fled in the aftermath of the attack.

Concerns, however, remained about risks of transmission amid the chaos.

"I fear that the aid workers involved in combating this Ebola outbreak are going to leave the area. This risks making the task of eradicating the outbreak more difficult," said Christophe Munyanderu, a civil society leader in Ituri's Irumu territory.