

Official: DR Congo Ebola Cases Reach Record 560

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Ebola cases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have reached at least 560, with 368 deaths, the Ministry of Public Health confirmed Wednesday.

"Ebola — the situation on Wednesday, January 2, 2019: a total of 608 cases (560 confirmed and 48 possible), 368 [people] died and 207 have recovered," the DRC Ministry of Public Health wrote on Twitter.

An additional 29 people are being investigated on suspicion that they may have contacted the virus. More than 200 people have recovered from Ebola, the ministry said. The virus is spread through direct contact with the fluids of an infected person.

"The activities of the response to Beni and Butembo have been severely disrupted following the demonstrations of the population," the health minister said in a statement, referring to the long-awaited elections causing interruptions to health care.

"The majority of the teams were unable to deploy in both cities but were able to work remotely with local health workers who maintained minimal field activity."

Vaccination activities were also suspended.

The mortality of people infected with Ebola is 50%, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Ebola causes fever, severe headache and in some cases hemorrhaging.

"We have reached a critical point in the Ebola response. After an intensification of field activities, we were seeing hopeful signs in many areas, including a recent decrease in cases in Beni," Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO's

director-general, stated Friday.

"These gains could be lost if we suffer a period of prolonged insecurity, resulting in increased transmission. That would be a tragedy for the local population, who have already suffered too much."

The recent outbreak of the deadly virus, which is transferred to humans by animals, began in August and has a fatality rate of as high as 60%. The outbreak is the second-deadliest and second-largest in history. WHO recalled that the 2014 outbreak of Ebola in West Africa claimed to some 11,000.

Ebola is named after the DRC's Ebola River, near where it was discovered in 1976.

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