

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) health ministry declared an Ebola virus outbreak on Wednesday in the southern-central Kasai province, reporting 28 suspected cases, 15 of them fatal, the World Health Organization (WHO) said.

Four healthcare workers are among those infected, highlighting a pattern seen in previous Ebola outbreaks, which spread through contact with blood and other infected body fluids.

The affected areas, Bulape and Mweka health zones, are remote, requiring about a day's drive from Tshikapa, Kasai's provincial capital. Air access is limited. Laboratory tests conducted on September 3 at the National Institute of Biomedical Research in Kinshasa confirmed the presence of Ebola Zaire.

This is the first outbreak in Kasai province since 2008. WHO has deployed a rapid response team to support surveillance, case management, laboratory activities, and infection prevention in healthcare facilities. Two tons of medical supplies, including personal protective equipment, mobile lab kits, and other essentials, have also been dispatched.

"Banking on the country's long-standing expertise in controlling viral disease outbreaks, we're working closely with the health authorities to quickly scale up key response measures to end the outbreak as soon as possible," said Mohamad Janabi, WHO regional director for Africa.

The DRC has a stockpile of Ebola treatments and 2,000 doses of the Ervebo (VSV-EBOV) vaccine. Since 1976, the country has recorded 15 Ebola outbreaks, with the last occurring in 2022 in Equateur province. Health officials noted that the current virus strain differs from previous outbreaks in Kasai.

According to epidemiologic details shared by Africa CDC, the outbreak began on August 20 with a 34-year-old pregnant woman, who was admitted to the hospital that day and died five days later. Bulape Health Zone officials reported the suspected viral hemorrhagic fever cluster on August 28.

Of the 28 suspected cases, 15 are male and 13 are female, with more than half aged 20 to 39. All patients presented with fever, and nearly half exhibited bleeding symptoms.

Africa CDC is coordinating with local authorities, with Director-General Jean Kaseya

visiting the country to discuss support for response efforts. Health experts stress that while the DRC faces multiple health challenges, it is well-equipped to contain the outbreak.