

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is facing a severe health crisis as budget cuts and blocked access to medical supplies fuel outbreaks of infectious diseases, particularly in the conflict-affected eastern provinces.

The World Health Organization (WHO) sounded the alarm on Friday, March 28, warning that the depletion of vital health resources is endangering millions.

According to Dr. Thierno Baldé, incident manager at the WHO Africa Office, around 1.5 million people in North Kivu are currently affected by cuts to essential health services. “Vital services are no longer being provided to the population, including primary healthcare, sexual and reproductive health services, and nutrition support,” Dr. Baldé said from Goma.

The shortage of vaccines is becoming critical, with North Kivu’s Goma nearly out of stock of routine vaccines. Margaret Harris, WHO spokesperson, cautioned that the global implications of vaccine shortages are profound. “Infectious diseases don’t care about borders, elections, or governments. If you don’t vaccinate everywhere, you’ll be affected everywhere,” she warned.

The funding crisis has also hindered responses to sexual violence in conflict zones. WHO is now the only agency still providing post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) kits to rape survivors, said Dr. Baldé. Meanwhile, the eastern DRC remains a hotspot for MPOX, with nearly 10,000 cases reported this year in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri. Despite the challenges, WHO vaccinated 4,000 people in the past two weeks.

### **Populations at Risk**

Measles outbreaks are also a growing concern, with dwindling stocks of childhood vaccines posing a serious threat to immunization programs. Dr. Baldé revealed that only two weeks’ worth of vaccines remain, putting life-saving interventions at risk.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) echoed these concerns, highlighting that 13 million displaced people, including 6.3 million children, are particularly vulnerable. Allen Maina, head of public health at UNHCR, warned that health services are on the brink of collapse. The agency’s 2025 health budget has been slashed by 87% compared to 2024, causing severe shortages of medical staff, essential medicines, and clean water.

“The health consequences of budget cuts are expected to be devastating, exposing

more than 520,000 refugees to an increased risk of infectious diseases and death," Maina stated.

As healthcare systems buckle under pressure, health experts have called for urgent restoration of funding to avert a catastrophic public health disaster.