

Ebola reemerges in the eastern Congo, complicating COVID-19 vaccine rollout

[A woman in the Democratic Republic of Congo] was found with symptoms of [Ebola] in the town of Biena on Feb. 1 and died in hospital in Butembo on Feb. 3.

She was married to a man who had contracted the virus in a previous outbreak. It was not yet clear if the case marks the start of a new outbreak or if it represents a manageable flare-up from an outbreak in the region that killed over 2,200 people between 2018 and 2020, the second-most in the disease's history.

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More than 70 people who came into contact with the dead woman have been tracked and the places she visited are being disinfected, said the World Health Organisation, which is helping with the response.

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The emergence of more cases could complicate efforts to eradicate COVID-19, which has infected 23,600 people and killed 681 in Congo. A coronavirus vaccination campaign is expected to start in the first half of this year.

However, an Ebola vaccine and a well-drilled health system means the country is better-placed than ever to deal with outbreaks, even in urban settings. Ebola has a much higher death rate than COVID-19, but unlike coronavirus it is not transmitted by asymptomatic carriers.

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