



Centre for Migrant
and Refugee Health
We embrace your health

07 DECEMBER 2024

PRESS RELEASE

ADDRESSING HEALTH CHALLENGES FROM MYSTERY DISEASE IN CONGO

The Centre for Migrant and Refugee Health (CMRH) is issuing an urgent call to action to address a growing public health emergency stemming from a mystery disease in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The disease has claimed up to 143 lives in the Panzi health zone of Kwango Province between November 10 and 25, 2024, and poses a severe risk to health systems in East Africa, particularly for migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking populations.

The Crisis

Provincial Health Minister Apollinaire Yumba reported that the symptoms of the mystery disease include high fever, headaches, coughing, and anaemia—flu-like conditions that are rapidly spreading in a region with limited healthcare resources. Women and children are among the most severely impacted, as noted by local epidemiologists. Civil society leaders have raised alarm over the increasing number of cases and the shortage of essential medicines in this rural health zone.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been informed and is collaborating with Congo's public health ministry to identify the illness and implement emergency measures. However, the lack of timely disease surveillance and underresourced healthcare systems exacerbate the risks for East African nations that are home to large numbers of displaced populations.

PRESS CONTACT:

+613 9008 4599 

communications@cmrh.org.au 

Info@cmrh.org.au

24 Central Parkway Caroline Springs Vic 3023

Location: Melbourne, Australia



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Implications for East Africa

- **Health Risks:** High transmission potential due to overcrowded living conditions in camps and urban areas.
- **Mental Health Burden:** Heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and trauma among migrants and refugees exposed to health crises.
- **Healthcare Overload:** Strained medical systems are unable to cope with simultaneous outbreaks of diseases such as MPOX and now this mystery illness.

Recommendations for Immediate Action

CMRH calls on international donors, public health stakeholders, and humanitarian organizations to act decisively to contain the spread of this disease and protect vulnerable populations. The following measures are critical:

- **Enhanced Surveillance:** Immediate investment in disease monitoring systems to identify and respond to outbreaks early.
- **Emergency Healthcare Services:** Deployment of mobile clinics and provision of essential medicines to affected regions.
- **Mental Health Interventions:** Incorporating trauma support and counselling as part of emergency responses.
- **Resource Allocation:** Bolstering local healthcare infrastructure with training and resources to manage crises effectively.

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- **Community Awareness:** Educating local populations on prevention strategies, including safe practices when handling deceased individuals, as advised by health authorities.

Call to Australians and Global Partners

Australians and international visitors to East Africa are urged to:

- **Support Relief Efforts:** Contribute to global health funds dedicated to emergency response and preventive healthcare.
- **Advocate for Action:** Work with organizations like CMRH to amplify the voices of affected communities and push for equitable health policies.
- **Collaborate on Solutions:** Partner with health organizations to deliver life-saving interventions in impacted areas.

CMRH's Role

The Centre for Migrant and Refugee Health is committed to mitigating the health and mental health impacts of this crisis. In collaboration with any international agencies, including WHO and other partners, CMRH will:

- Mobilize resources to provide urgent care and support in the Panzi health zone.
- Launch integrated programs addressing both the physical and mental health needs of displaced populations.
- Advocate for sustainable health infrastructure to prevent future crises.

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Join Us in This Fight

The Centre for Migrant and Refugee Health calls upon governments, international agencies, and concerned individuals to come together to address this public health emergency. Only through collective action can we safeguard the health and future of vulnerable populations in East Africa.

For media inquiries, partnership opportunities, or donations, please contact:

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