



# ASEAN BIODIASPORA VIRTUAL CENTER

## DISEASE ALERT



December 6, 2024 | Issue No. 25

**First alert: December 5, 2024**

**Second alert: December 6, 2024 | Unknown Febrile Illness in Democratic Republic of the Congo**

### SUB-LOCATIONS AFFECTED

Kwango (Panzi)



Source: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/sustainability/health/unknown-disease-kills-143-in-southwest-dr-congo-4844708>

### Event Description

An unidentified, flu-like disease has emerged in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), specifically in the Kwango province, leading to significant fatalities. From October 24 to December 5, 2024, at least 71 deaths have been confirmed. Symptoms associated with this illness include high fever, headaches, cough, nasal congestion, respiratory distress, and anemia. The Ministry of Public Health, Hygiene and Social Welfare is concerned about the rising number of infections, which now exceeds 300 cases, and has launched an emergency response.

## Epidemiological Information

The outbreak is centered in the Panzi Health Zone of Kwango Province, a region characterized by rural health challenges and limited medical resources. The regional health minister has described the situation as alarming, with 382 reported cases, 52% of which involve children aged 0–5 years. As of December 5, the Health Ministry has confirmed 71 deaths, reflecting a 19% fatality rate. Discrepancies in earlier data from the Africa Centre for Disease Control, which reported 376 cases and 79 deaths, were attributed to issues with surveillance and case definition.

Of the 71 confirmed deaths, 44 occurred at home, while 27 took place in healthcare centers. Among these, 10 fatalities were attributed to a lack of blood transfusions, and 17 resulted from respiratory complications.

The Director-General of the National Institute of Public Health revealed that national authorities only became aware of the outbreak in early December—approximately six weeks after it began. In response, emergency operations have been activated. The Director-General noted that the illness appears to be airborne, based on respiratory symptoms, but it remains unclear whether the disease is a newly emerging pathogen or a previously known illness that has re-emerged.

## Response Measures

The Ministry of Public Health has mobilized resources to address the outbreak, with support from the National Institute of Public Health (INSP) and the Emergency Operations Center for Public Health (COUSP). Response efforts include:

1. Case Management: Rapid response teams have been deployed to provide immediate care to affected individuals.
2. Sample Collection: Patient samples are being collected for laboratory analysis to determine the cause of the illness.
3. Field Investigations: In-depth epidemiological investigations are being conducted to identify the source and nature of the disease.
4. Community Guidance: The public is urged to adhere to preventive measures:
  - a. Avoid mass gatherings.
  - b. Report suspicious illnesses or unusual deaths to health authorities.
  - c. Practice hand hygiene by washing hands regularly with soap and water.
  - d. Avoid handling remains of deceased individuals without qualified health personnel.

The Ministry has committed to providing regular updates on laboratory findings and the progress of investigations. Coordination with national and international health partners is ongoing to ensure an effective response to this public health crisis. For further assistance, the public can contact the Ministry's toll-free hotline at 151. Vice Governor of Kwango announced the imminent arrival of a team of epidemiological experts to collect samples to be sent to the National Institute for

Biomedical Research (INRB). The Vice Governor also announced assistance in medical supplies from WHO, SANRU, UNICEF and provincial and national elected officials of Kwango to deal with this health crisis.

Currently, there is no testing capacity in the Panzi Health Zone. Five patient samples have been sent to a laboratory in Kikwit, the largest city in neighboring Kwilu Province, located about 300 miles away. The results, expected by Saturday, December 7, 2024, are anticipated to provide critical insights into the disease's etiology. Meanwhile, the World Health Organization (WHO) has deployed a team to assist local health authorities in investigating the disease's characteristics and possible causes.

### Sources:

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3. **CIDRAP** (2024, December 6). Lab results expected soon in DR Congo's mystery outbreak. Available at: <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/misc-emerging-topics/lab-results-expected-soon-dr-congos-mystery-outbreak>
4. **NBC News** (2024, December 5). Mysterious illness in Congo has killed dozens of people, health authorities report. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/mysterious-disease-congo-kills-dozens-rcna182804>
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6. **The Cable** (2024, December 5). Mysterious flu-like disease kills 79 in Congo. Available at: <https://www.thecable.ng/mysterious-flu-like-disease-kills-79-in-congo/>