

take precautions against exposing themselves to the Ebola virus, and whether all this is going to take place in a trial setting.

Meanwhile, differences between WHO and MSF over the vaccination drives with the Merck vaccine have been made public. “Despite the availability of a highly effective Ebola vaccine in northeast DRC, only a fraction of the eligible population is receiving it. One reason for this is WHO’s strict limits on the number of doses used in the field”, stated MSF, on Sept 23, 2019. “MSF’s efforts to expand access to the vaccination ... have been frustrated by the tight controls on supply and eligibility criteria imposed by the WHO.”

230 055 people have thus far received the Merck vaccine. WHO’s Ibrahim Soce Fall believes that MSF’s criticisms are unfair. “We are using the vaccine under very strict protocols”, he explained. “MSF just wants to go out and vaccinate everybody but that is not

what ring vaccination is about—you have to investigate deeply to identify contacts and contacts of contacts, before you can start vaccinating.” Johnson responds that the listing of contacts is incomplete. “We are reaching only about half of people who need to be vaccinated, and the evidence that the ring vaccination strategy is not working is plain to see—we have been vaccinating for over a year now without stopping the epidemic”, he said.

“If you do not have access to an area, because of insecurity or mistrust, of course ring vaccination will suffer”, said Soce Fall. “But where we do have access, most of the time we are starting to vaccinate within 24 hours.” He points out that the vaccine has to be maintained at a temperature well below zero. “We cannot send all the vaccine to DRC; we have a very clear approach to deploying it”. Merck has a stockpile of 190 000 doses, and aims to release a further 650 000 doses within the next 18 months. “We have



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enough vaccine for the ring vaccination strategy”, stresses Soce Fall.

For the past 3 months or so, there has been a steady decline in the weekly number of reported cases of Ebola virus disease. But new cases are still springing up in areas which were previously unaffected or where transmission was thought to have been interrupted. It looks as if it will be some time before the epidemic runs its course.

Talha Burki

## Infectious disease surveillance update

### Polio in Philippines

On Sept 19, 2019, the Philippines reported an outbreak of polio following the reports of two cases of circulating vaccine-derived polio virus type 2 (VDPV2). Additionally, environmental samples from Manila (Aug 13) and Davao (Aug 22) also tested positive for VDPV2. The first case was confirmed on Sept 14, following confirmation from three laboratories: the Philippines National Polio laboratory, Japan Institute of Infectious Diseases, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The first case was a 3-year-old girl from Lanao del Sur and was genetically linked to previously tested environmental samples in Manila and Davao, indicating that the virus is circulating. The second case was a 5-year-old boy from Laguna province. Polio was declared eradicated in the Philippines when the last case was reported 19 years ago. Currently, a

single case of polio is the threshold for declaring an outbreak.

### Tularaemia in Sweden

As of Sept 30, Swedish health authorities have reported 960 cases of tularaemia since the outbreak began in July 2019. This is the highest number of cases reported in Sweden since the 1960s, surpassing the previous highest annual number of 859 in 2015.

### Dengue in Brazil

As of Sept 14, 1 993 271 cases of dengue have been reported in Brazil in 2019, of which 1 064 011 have been laboratory confirmed, with all four serotypes being reported. Among the cases, 1208 have had severe dengue and during this period 634 deaths were reported.

### Plague in DR Congo

Following the news of the death of a rodent and a guinea pig

reported to the health authorities on Sept 25, a family cluster of four cases with symptoms consistent with bubonic plague were identified in Aru health zone, Ituri province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The family were admitted on the same day and received treatment with doxycycline. However, one of the patients, a 15-year-old boy who also had symptoms of an inguinal swollen lymph node alongside the high fever that all patients had presented with, died from his illness on Sept 26. The health zone team began control and prevention activities on Sept 27, by spraying houses, identifying at-risk patients to be given preventive doxycycline, and raising awareness in the community. As of Sept 27, 12 suspected plague cases have been recorded including three deaths.

Ruth Zwizwai



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For more on the **Philippines polio outbreak** see <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/red-cross-alarmpolio-outbreak-philippines-19-years-191002055300864.html>

For the **WHO account of the polio outbreak** see <https://www.who.int/csr/don/24-september-2019-polio-outbreak-the-philippines/en/>

For more on **tularaemia in Sweden** see <http://outbreaknewstoday.com/sweden-tularaemia-cases-decrease-significantly-after-recording-most-cases-in-decades-67598/>

For more on **dengue in Brazil** see <http://www.paho.org/data/index.php/en/mnu-topics/indicadores-dengue-en/dengue-nacional-en/252-dengue-pais-ano-en.html?start=1>

For more on **plague in DR Congo** see <https://www.promedmail.org/post/6710185>