Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

alert

EL NIÑO HEIGHTENS RIFT VALLEY FEVER RISK IN EASTERN AFRICA: COUNTRIES URGED TO PREPARE

26 October 2026 – Update to the alert of 31 July 2026

Key facts:

1. Rift Valley fever (RVF) is an acute, vector-borne, viral and zoonotic disease that can have severe impacts on livelihoods, national and international markets and human health.
2. The disease has been observed in sheep, goats, cattle, buffaloes, camels and humans. The virus is transmitted primarily by mosquitoes and the movement of infected animals.
3. RVF virus can remain viable in mosquito eggs laid on the ground. Heavy rainfall and prolonged flooding create favourable conditions for mosquito breeding, determining massive hatching of RVF-competent *Aedes* and *Culex* mosquitoes and increasing the risk of RVF emergence, transmission and spread.
4. The dynamic prediction model calibrated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) builds upon the work of Anyamba *et al.* (2009, 2010), using vegetation and rainfall anomalies as a proxy for ecological dynamics to map areas potentially at risk of RVF in Eastern Africa.
5. The FAO RVF Early Warning panel of experts verifies forecast risk areas in consultation with experts on the ground to assess whether conditions warrant an RVF alert.
6. RVF outbreaks can severely affect livestock production by depleting the future generation of affected herds through massive abortions and neonatal mortality, posing a significant socio-economic and food security threat to vulnerable households. They can also reduce households' income, limit access to health care and child education, disrupt trade and adversely affect national and regional economies.

Rift Valley fever (RVF) is directly linked to El Niño conditions: heavy rainfall and flooding expand mosquito breeding sites and can disrupt veterinary services and livelihoods, placing Eastern Africa, the Indian Ocean islands and parts of the Arabian Peninsula at highest risk. Based on the October 2026 forecast of the FAO RVF Early Warning Decision Support Tool (RVF DST), which continuously monitors the environmental drivers of mosquito amplification across Africa, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) urge countries to act before rainfall peaks.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **El Niño is at near-record strength**, comparable to 1997–1998, when one of the largest RVF epizootics and epidemics on record struck Eastern Africa. It is expected to persist into early 2027.
- **RVF risk is increasing across Eastern Africa between October 2026 and January 2027**, driven by above-average rainfall and flooding. Countries and territories at highest risk include Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda. Risk is also increasing in Burundi and Rwanda, and to a lesser extent, in the Comoros, northern Madagascar, Mayotte, southwestern Saudi Arabia and western Yemen.
- **Countries should act now:** strengthen risk-based surveillance, pre-position vaccines and supplies, and coordinate across sectors and borders under a One Health approach.

Climate outlook, October–December 2026

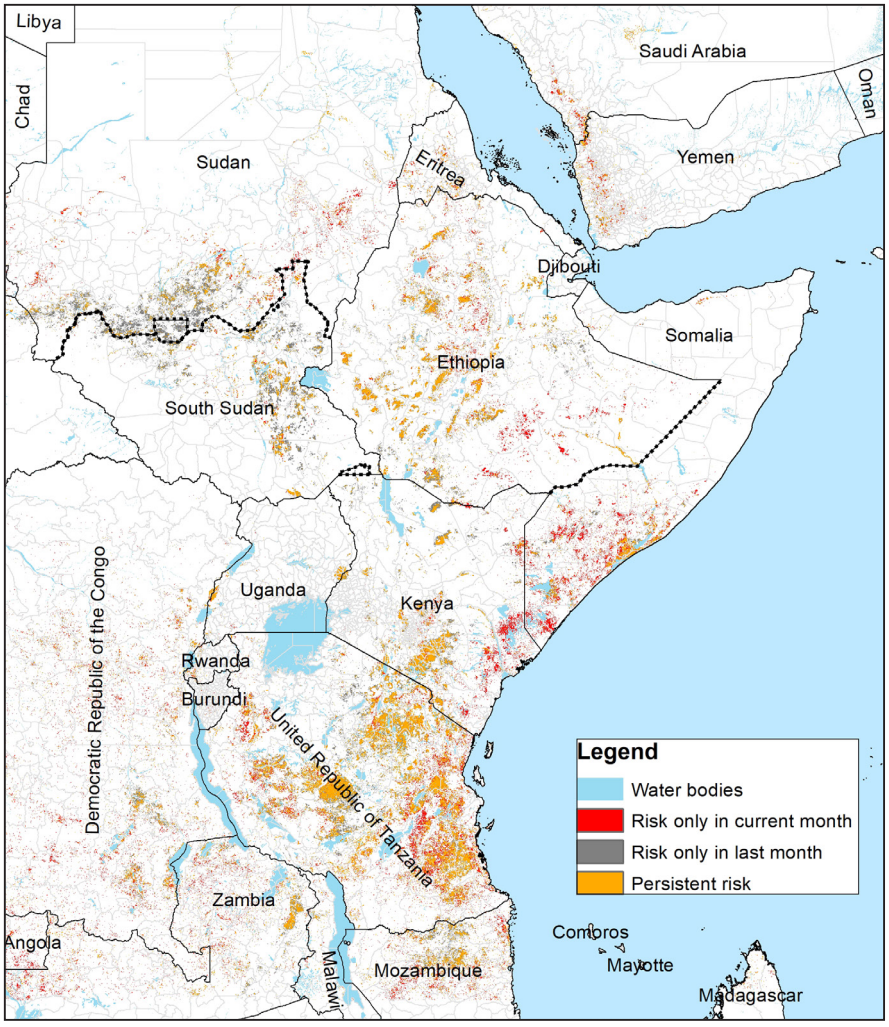
Above-average rainfall and flooding are expected across most of Eastern Africa. The highest probability (90 percent, over 400 mm) is forecast for southern Ethiopia, Kenya, and central and southern Somalia. Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania are also expected to experience wetter-than-normal conditions. The western Indian Ocean islands and parts of the Arabian Peninsula, particularly western Saudi Arabia, face increased flood risk. Drier-than-normal conditions are expected in southern Sudan and across Southern Africa. Warmer than average temperatures are forecast for much of the Greater Horn of Africa.

Current and projected RVF risk

RVF suitability is expected to increase across much of Eastern Africa between October 2026 and January 2027. Following a long period of rainfall deficits, rainfall has picked up in recent weeks in parts of southern Sudan, western South Sudan, eastern Ethiopia, southern Somalia and coastal Kenya, with heavy rains and a rising flood risk in Ethiopia and Somalia. According to the RVF DST, the United Republic of Tanzania currently has the largest extensive of suitable areas, followed by Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and southern Sudan. New suitable areas have also emerged in southern Somalia, Rwanda and Burundi. With heavy rains forecast for the rest of the season, suitable areas are expected to expand further, including in Uganda. These conditions are likely to create mosquito breeding habitats, which, combined with livestock movements and exposure, could raise outbreak risk and complicate surveillance and response.

The countries and territories that could be most affected by RVF in the coming period are Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. In addition, wetter-than-normal conditions may increase RVF suitability later in the season in parts of the western Indian Ocean and the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in the Comoros, Mayotte, northern Madagascar and areas along the border between southwestern Saudi Arabia and western Yemen, where new suitable areas have already emerged.

Figure 1. Forecasted risk of RVF vector amplification in Eastern Africa for October 2026



Source: United Nations, 2020, modified with the data from the FAO web-based RVF Early Warning Decision Support Tool, October 2026 (RVF DST).

Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of FAO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers and boundaries. Dashed lines on maps represent approximate border lines for which there may not yet be full agreement. Final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined. Final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined.

Useful links

- FAO. n.d. Rift Valley Fever Early Warning Decision Support Tool (RVF DST).
- FAO. 2022. Rift Valley fever action framework.
- FAO. 2018. Rift Valley fever surveillance.
- FAO. 2003. Recognizing Rift Valley fever.
- FAO. 2002. Preparation of Rift Valley fever contingency plans.
- FAO. 2023. What you need to know about Rift Valley Fever [video].
- FAO. n.d. Introduction to Rift Valley Fever open access.
- Kivaria *et al.* 2025. One hundred years of Rift Valley fever: Zigzagging through the disease. In: EMPRES Animal Health 360 No. 49/2025.
- FAO. 2021. Driving preparedness and anticipatory actions through innovation: A web-based Rift Valley fever Early Warning Decision Support Tool.
- Pittiglio, *et al.* 2024. Real-time disease risk monitoring and forecasting for early action. 12th International Conference on Agro-Geoinformatics, Novi Sad, Serbia, 2024, pp. 1-5.

FAO and IGAD recommendations

Countries at risk are urged to heighten RVF preparedness and implement the following measures:

Strengthen preparedness and coordination

- Review and update, as appropriate, contingency plans, standard operating procedures and emergency response mechanisms.
- Ensure effective coordination between animal health, public health, wildlife, environmental authorities and other relevant partners through a One Health approach.
- Identify at-risk areas and ensure that response plans, guidance and responsibilities are clearly communicated at all levels.
- Activate national and subnational One Health coordination platforms and emergency operations centres, where appropriate.
- Conduct preparedness simulation exercises and review lessons learned from previous RVF outbreaks to improve response readiness.

Enhance early warning, surveillance and detection

- Improve systems for the early detection and reporting of suspected RVF cases in animals and humans through active surveillance, community-based reporting and monitoring of sentinel herds.
- Increase monitoring in high-risk areas and encourage livestock keepers, veterinarians, public health personnel and community members to promptly report unusual livestock deaths, abortions or illness.
- Integrate climate, weather and environmental information into animal and public health surveillance to trigger anticipatory action in high-risk areas.
- Expand event-based surveillance in livestock markets, slaughterhouses, border crossings, quarantine stations and pastoral migration corridors, and train frontline animal and public health personnel to recognize and report signs of RVF.
- Promote the timely sharing of surveillance data between sectors and neighbouring countries.

Ensure diagnostic and response readiness

- Ensure that field teams are trained and equipped to investigate suspected cases safely and to collect, package and transport samples correctly.
- Confirm that laboratories have the capacity, reagents, biosafety procedures and referral mechanisms required for timely confirmation.

Implement preventive and control measures

- Apply appropriate measures, such as targeted vaccination, safe animal movement practices, quarantine for imports, where necessary, and vector control.
- Promote safe slaughtering, meat inspection and carcass disposal practices to reduce the risk of disease spread.
- Ensure that personal protective equipment and biosafety measures are available and used by veterinary personnel, laboratory staff, slaughterhouse workers and other responders and frontline workers.
- Enhance biosecurity measures on farms, at quarantine facilities and at livestock aggregation points.

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Engage communities and promote risk awareness

- Develop and disseminate clear, practical and culturally appropriate messages through trusted channels, including community leaders, schools and media.
- Promote the early reporting of abortions, neonatal deaths and unexplained livestock mortality.
- Encourage the safe handling of sick or dead animals and aborted materials, and promote measures to prevent mosquito bites, particularly among high-risk groups.
- Gather and respond to community feedback to strengthen trust and improve response efforts.

Strengthen cross-border coordination

- Enhance information sharing and coordination with neighbouring countries, particularly along livestock trade routes, pastoral corridors and other areas with frequent animal movement.
- Strengthen cross-border surveillance and reporting by undertaking joint risk assessments in border areas through existing memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and implementation frameworks.
- Conduct coordinated surveillance and vector monitoring in transboundary ecosystems and shared grazing areas.
- Foster coordination among veterinary authorities, border inspection posts, quarantine stations and customs officials to minimize the transboundary spread of RVF.

Monitor, evaluate and document response

- Regularly assess preparedness and response capacities using agreed indicators and update preparedness plans based on evolving risks.
- Document outbreak investigations, response actions and lessons learned to strengthen future preparedness and support regional knowledge sharing.

For enquiries, technical support or further information on at-risk areas, please contact FAO (empres-animal-health@fao.org, ectad-sfe-sfs-manager@fao.org) or IGAD (icpald@igad.int).

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