Ebola: Why is there still no vaccine?

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Ebola has been known for decades, but there is still no vaccine against the Bundibugyo strain of the virus causing the current outbreak. New research raises hopes of protection against the various types of Ebola.

1976: A hitherto unknown disease breaks out near the Ebola River in the country then known as Zaire. This was the first scientifically documented epidemic.

Now, 50 years on, the DRC once again finds itself. This time the pathogen is the less common Bundibugyo type of the genus Orthoebolavirus. The virus was identified in 2007 during an outbreak in Bundibugyo. Another outbreak occurred in the DRC in 2012.

Torsten Feldt, A doctor of tropical medicine at Düsseldorf's University Hospital, sees this as A missed opportunity. "We had come across the Bundibugyo virus in two previous outbreaks: 2007 and 2012 in DR Congo. So we had enough time to develop vaccines and therapeutic options. But we didn't make use of this opportunity, meaning crucial time was lost during the current outbreak."

Leonie Mayer from the German Centre for Infection Research (DZIF) and the Institute for Infection Research and Vaccine Development at the University Medical Centre in Hamburg-Eppendorf agree. "They could of course have developed A vaccine and run pre-clinical trials before," Mayer told DW. She stressed, however, that their effectiveness can only be assessed and confirmed during an actual outbreak.