

The assurance comes amid growing concern among parents following reports of rising Ebola Virus Disease cases in the country.

BY JANE NAFULA

The government has dismissed speculation that schools could be closed due to the ongoing Ebola outbreak, assuring parents, learners and education institutions that there are no plans to suspend learning activities.

The assurance comes amid growing concern among parents following reports of rising Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) cases in the country and recent government measures aimed at containing the outbreak.

Speaking yesterday, the Ministry of Education and Sports spokesperson, Dr Dennis Mugimba (PhD), urged the public to disregard social media messages and videos claiming that schools would soon be closed.

"Please ignore videos and social media messages speculating about closures of educational institutions. Parents and heads of institutions are urged to remain vigilant and observe Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) as guided by the Ministry of Health," Dr Mugimba said in a statement.

He urged the public to rely only on information issued through official government communication channels.

The ministry's clarification follows growing anxiety among parents, many of whom fear a repeat of the prolonged school closures witnessed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Some parents expressed concern that another shutdown could leave them financially strained after recently paying school fees for the new term.

"I just obtained a loan and cleared fees

# Ebola: Schools to remain open



Some of the temporary facilities which have been constructed at the former Mulago play ground to isolate suspected Ebola patients. PHOTO/STÉPHEN OTAGE

for my five children. I did the same in 2020, only for schools to be closed. The schools didn't refund my hard-earned money, and I struggle to raise fees," one concerned parent said.

Uganda's education sector was among the hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools remained closed between 2020 and 2021 as part of measures to curb the spread of the virus.

On January 10, 2022, the government fully reopened schools after 83 weeks of closure, the longest uninterrupted shutdown of educational institutions

anywhere in the world during the pandemic.

Likewise, Mr Allan Kasujja, the Executive Director of the Uganda Media Center, said, "No schools have been closed. No districts are under lockdown."

The latest reassurance comes as health authorities intensify efforts to contain Ebola following confirmation of additional cases. According to the Ministry of Health, Uganda had registered nine confirmed Ebola cases by May 31, including two new infections

reported in the latest update.

Last week, the government announced the temporary closure of Uganda's border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), citing the escalating Ebola outbreak in the neighbouring country and the risk posed by cross-border movements.

Speaking during a press briefing at the Uganda Media Centre on May 27, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Dr Diana Atwine, said the decision was reached by the National Ebola Task Force chaired by Vice Presi-

dent Jessica Alupo.

"Following the continued escalation in the scale of the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the challenges associated with cross-border movements between DRC and Uganda, leading to a high risk of the spread of Ebola into Uganda, the National Task Force agreed that Uganda is temporarily closing the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo with immediate effect," Dr Atwine said.

She explained that only authorised Ebola response teams, humanitarian workers, food and cargo transporters, and security personnel would be permitted to cross the border, subject to strict health screening measures.

Health officials have continued to urge members of the public to observe preventive measures, including regular handwashing, avoiding unnecessary physical contact, promptly reporting suspected symptoms and seeking medical attention when unwell.

For now, education authorities maintain that schools will remain open, provided institutions continue to implement the Ministry of Health's recommended safety protocols.

## PREVENTION

- Avoid physical contact with anyone showing the Ebola symptoms
- Practice hand washing and maintain good hand hygiene at all times
- Avoid contact with body fluids that include urine, blood, sweat, saliva, vomitus, and stool
- Seek appropriate health care services immediately when you experience Ebola-like symptoms
- Handling and burial of dead bodies of suspected Ebola patients should be supervised by the health team
- All public places should institute hand-washing facilities at their premises.