

UGANDA SENDS 160 MEDICS TO FIGHT EBOLA IN DR CONGO

By John Musenze

President Yoweri Museveni has assured the World Health Organisation (WHO) of Uganda's continued commitment and preparedness to contain the current Ebola outbreak, emphasising the importance of regional co-operation and swift public health interventions to prevent the spread of the disease.

He made the remarks on Monday during a meeting with WHO director-general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus at State House Entebbe. The meeting was also attended by senior officials from the Ministry of Health and the WHO Uganda office.

Museveni revealed that he had already held productive discussions with the President of the DR Congo, Félix Tshisekedi, on how the two countries can limit the cross-border spread of Ebola.

"We have been engaging our counterparts in the DRC to ensure that we work together in addressing this challenge," he said.

The Ministry of Health permanent secretary, Dr Diana Atwine, briefed the meeting on the current status of the outbreak, stating that Uganda has been managing 19 Ebola cases.

She said 14 of the 19 cases include members of the same family who entered Uganda from the DR Congo. Atwine, however, reported encouraging progress in the containment efforts, noting that no new Ebola case has been registered in the previous three days.

"Our surveillance and response teams remain fully engaged. We continue to monitor contacts, strengthen screening measures, and ensure that all suspected cases are promptly identified and managed," she said.

Atwine said two mobile laboratories had already been established in Bwera, Kasese and Arua districts to support testing and diagnostics.

UGANDA TO DEPLOY 160 MEDICS

The State House meeting happened as Uganda prepared to deploy 160 health workers to the DR Congo and establish 50-bed Ebola treatment units across outbreak hotspots in a major regional intervention aimed at stopping the disease at its source.

The deployment, one of Uganda's largest health emergency support missions to a neighbouring country, comes as authorities grapple with a growing number of Ebola infections imported from eastern DR Congo.

According to the Ministry of Health, the intervention will strengthen surveillance, laboratory testing, case management and infection prevention measures in affected areas of eastern Congo, where Ebola continues to spread.

The 160 health workers will be deployed in four teams of 40 personnel each and will include clinicians, epidemiologists, laboratory specialists, surveillance officers and infection prevention experts. Each team will be supported by a high-tech Class A laboratory to improve rapid diagnosis and response.

Dr Daniel Kyabayinze, the director of public health at the Ministry of Health, said the deployment followed requests from Congolese authorities and regional consultations.

"We are planning to deploy four teams of health workers, each comprising about 40 personnel, to support Ebola response activities in eastern DR Congo. The objective is to strengthen surveillance, case management, laboratory services and infection prevention measures where the outbreak is currently concentrated," he told journalists.

Kyabayinze said controlling transmission in eastern DR Congo remains Uganda's best defence against additional imported infections.

"Many of the cases we are seeing are connected to transmission occurring across the border. If we can support our colleagues in DR Congo to rapidly detect, isolate and manage cases, we shall reduce the risk of further spread into Uganda.

"We cannot wait for the outbreak to spread further. The best strategy is to work together and stop it where it is occurring. That is why this deployment is important for both Uganda and the DR Congo," he added.

FIRST TEAM READY FOR DEPLOYMENT

Sources familiar with the preparations said Uganda is expected to deploy an initial team of 80 health workers this week after weeks of specialised training at Mulago Hospital. The sources said the mission will be led by outbreaks incident commander Dr Henry Kyobe, who has handled multiple outbreaks, including Ebola, Mpox and COVID-19.

"Two laboratories designated to support the initial teams have already been delivered to DR Congo. The teams



Ghebreyesus (right) addressing journalists. He was flanked by the commissioner of clinical services in the Ministry of Health, Rony Bahatungire (left) and the World Health Organisation representative and head of mission, Dr Kasonde Mwinga (centre). This was during his visit to Mulago Referral Hospital isolation unit in Kampala on Monday

UGANDA TO HOST SUPPORT HUB

Africa Centres for Disease Control (CDC) has announced plans to establish a continental incident management support team in Uganda to co-ordinate international efforts aimed at containing the Ebola outbreak.

The team, which will be jointly led by Africa CDC and the World Health Organisation under the leadership of the Ugandan Government, is expected to strengthen co-ordination among local, regional and global response partners.

Dr Tolbert Nyenswah, the director of pandemic prevention, preparedness and response at Africa CDC, said he was in Uganda specifically to support the establishment of the response co-ordination structure, which will oversee technical and operational support for outbreak control activities.

He said the team would help mobilise resources, strengthen surveillance systems and improve co-ordination of interventions across affected areas in Uganda and neighbouring DR Congo.

Last month, regional leaders agreed to strengthen surveillance and harmonise response measures during high-level discussions involving Uganda, DR Congo, South Sudan and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

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The number of Ebola cases Uganda has been managing, according to the health ministry.

will be stationed in Aru [northern DRC] and Kasenyi in Ituri province, while another laboratory will be positioned in Rwampara. Final logistical arrangements are being completed," a senior health official said.

The health workers will work alongside Congolese authorities and international partners such as WHO and Africa Centres for Disease Control (CDC).

This is not the first time that Uganda is sending experts to other parts of Africa to fight Ebola.

In 2014, current energy minister Dr Monica Musenero was part of the team that was sent to Sierra Leone to help fight the worst Ebola outbreak that claimed over 11,000 people.

FIVE PATIENTS RECOVER

Kyabayinze said 15 of the 19 confirmed cases were imported from the DR Congo, while four infections occurred among Ugandan health workers, underscoring the cross-border nature of the outbreak.

He said since the outbreak was declared on May 15, five recoveries and two deaths of the DR Congo nationals have been registered, leaving 12 active cases under management.

Despite the increase in cases, Kyabayinze said Uganda's surveillance and response systems have succeeded in rapidly identifying, isolating and managing patients before widespread community transmission occurs.

According to the Ministry of Health, Uganda has intensified screening at border points, strengthened contact tracing and expanded laboratory testing capacity in high-risk districts with the establishment of mobile laboratories in Bwera, Kasese and Arua

border points to support diagnostics.

The announcement comes as Ghebreyesus started off his visit to Uganda to assess the country's readiness to respond to the outbreak and review measures aimed at preventing further spread.

After visiting treatment facilities and meeting frontline health workers yesterday, he described Uganda's response as a model of effective outbreak management.

He commended the Government for rapidly detecting imported cases and swiftly declaring the outbreak on May 15. "Uganda detected cases imported from DR Congo as early as possible and declared the emergency very swiftly. The system has remained vigilant in detecting cases and responding appropriately," Ghebreyesus said.

The WHO chief singled out Museveni's decision to call off this year's Martyrs Day celebrations as one of the most important public health measures taken since the outbreak began.

"If that event had not been delayed, we would probably now be counting cases in three digits or more. It was a very wise decision," he said.

Ghebreyesus said Uganda's experience from previous Ebola outbreaks has strengthened its emergency response systems and enabled health authorities to respond quickly when the latest cases were detected.

The WHO chief emphasised that sustained collaboration between Uganda and DR Congo will be critical to ending the outbreak, disclosing that cross-border co-ordination featured prominently in discussions with Museveni, Congolese authorities and regional partners.

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and other health authorities have repeatedly warned that the porous Uganda-DR Congo border and frequent movement of people for trade, healthcare and family visits continue to pose a significant risk of disease transmission.



Progress registered: Atwine