

EBOLA: MUSEVENI WARNS AGAINST CARELESSNESS

By John Musenze

President Yoweri Museveni has warned Ugandans against complacency in the face of the ongoing Ebola outbreak, saying the disease can be easily contained if people avoid unnecessary, physical contact, report symptoms early and follow guidance from health authorities.

In a national address yesterday evening, Museveni said Ebola differs significantly from diseases such as COVID-19 because it is spread through direct contact with infected bodily fluids rather than through the air.

The President said this characteristic makes Ebola easier to control, provided individuals remain disciplined and avoid practices that expose them to infection.

"We fought Corona recently, and even Ebola in the past. So even this one, we can fight it and win it. Ebola is an aggressive disease, but in my view, it is not as difficult to fight as Corona because it spreads through contact. If you are not close to it, you cannot spread it," Museveni said.

The President's address was in Kiswahili and English for the regional audience.

Museveni argued that many Ebola infections occur because people ignore basic precautions and continue engaging in behaviours that bring them into direct contact with infected individuals or contaminated materials.

"Now, if it is spreading only through contact and intimate contact, then it means it is really spreading because of carelessness," he said.

The President used previous outbreaks to illustrate how the disease can spread from animals to humans. He recounted a major Ebola outbreak in West Africa that was reportedly traced to a young boy who ate a mango that had been partially eaten by an infected bat.

Museveni said the incident demonstrated the importance of washing fruits before consumption and avoiding contact with materials that may have been contaminated by animals known to carry the virus.

He also cited a previous Ugandan outbreak that was linked to exposure to bats in caves, warning communities living near wildlife habitats to



President Museveni said many Ebola infections occur because people ignore basic precautions

remain vigilant. Beyond contact with bats, Museveni cautioned against consuming bush meat, particularly animals such as monkeys known to harbour the Ebola virus.

"The monkeys — if you eat monkeys, you are going to get Ebola," he said.

The President urged Ugandans to rely on meat inspected through approved channels such as abattoirs.

He expressed particular concern about infections among health workers and religious leaders, especially pastors, as well as people involved in traditional burial practices, saying these groups face heightened risk because they often come into close contact with infected individuals.

Museveni revealed that during a recent meeting with the director-general of the World Health Organisation, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, he was informed that medical personnel and pastors have been among the groups most affected in some outbreaks.

"The people who have died quite a bit in some of the areas are the medical staff and the pastors, because these pastors want to pray directly to the patients, and health workers are always taking care of the patients," Museveni said.

He attributed the infections among health workers to inadequate adherence to protective measures while treating patients and urged strict compliance with infection prevention protocols.

For religious leaders, Museveni warned against practices that involve touching patients during prayers, saying faith and science should work

VIRUS PERSISTS LONGER IN SALIVA THAN BLOOD

Speaking during a briefing on the Ebola outbreak, the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Health, Dr Diana Atwine, said the virus remains highly concentrated in saliva, vomit and stool, making these fluids potential sources of transmission even as patients recover.

"What is very clear now is that even when people clear the virus in the blood, the virus takes a little longer to clear in the saliva, in the stool and in the vomitus," Atwine said.

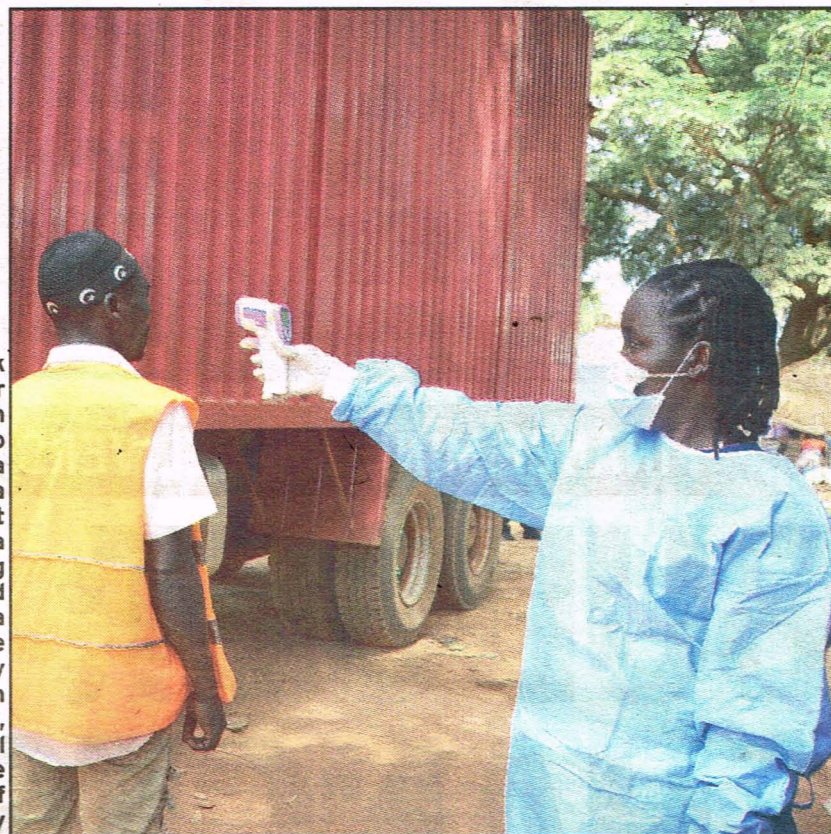
She explained that the findings are emerging from Uganda's management of patients infected with the Bundibugyo strain of Ebola and could contribute to the global scientific understanding of the disease.

"Even when somebody gets better, they may still be shedding some virus in the saliva and semen," Atwine said, saying health workers are now paying closer attention to other bodily fluids before declaring patients fully recovered.

The address came as Uganda continues to battle its ninth Ebola outbreak, caused by the Bundibugyo strain, for which there is currently no approved vaccine or specific treatment.

Despite the challenges, Atwine said patients receiving care in intensive care units and isolation

A track driver crossing from DR Congo to Uganda at the Vurra border post in Arua district being screened with a temperature gun by Sr. Lillian Eyotaru, a medical officer at the Vurra point of entry



facilities are responding well.

"All our patients that have been in the ICU [intensive care unit]; the ones that we are treating, are getting better. The ones that were really, really sick are getting better," she said.

Atwine urged the public not to share drinking cups, bottles or utensils, particularly with individuals showing symptoms such as fever, vomiting or general illness.

"Do not share a cup. Do not drink from a bottle someone has drunk from. Do not eat any fruit that you have found already eaten or with a broken part, because you do not know what animal could have eaten that fruit," she warned.

Health minister Dr Chris Baryomunsi said fruit bats are among the natural reservoirs of the Ebola virus and can contaminate fruits that are later consumed by humans.

The ministry has further recommended that churches temporarily avoid the use of a common cup during Holy Communion, arguing that saliva can facilitate the transmission of Ebola.

Baryomunsi added that Uganda's experience from previous outbreaks has strengthened its ability to detect, isolate and treat patients early, significantly improving survival rates.

together in protecting lives.

"You can pray to God. God is not deaf. You will pray without touching. God will hear you," he said.

The President also criticised practices that involve sharing cups or other items during religious ceremonies, arguing that such actions increase the risk of disease transmission. Another major concern highlighted in the address was the handling of dead bodies.

Museveni said traditional burial practices that involve washing, dressing and touching dead bodies accelerate Ebola transmission.

He urged families to immediately alert health authorities whenever a person falls seriously ill or dies under suspicious circumstances, rather than conducting private burials without medical guidance.

According to health experts, Ebola patients remain highly infectious, and the bodies of those who succumb to the disease can pose a significant risk to mourners.

"The most important thing is to report quickly to the doctors. Do not delay. Once you feel some symptoms of sickness, report so that they can check," the President said.

He explained that early intervention allows health workers to manage symptoms, replace lost fluids and improve a patient's chances of survival.

He, however, pointed to Uganda's recent recovery figures as evidence that patients can survive when they receive timely medical care.

NO NEW CASES

Museveni said Uganda has so far confirmed 19 Ebola cases

with five recoveries and only two deaths, with 14 infections imported from the DR Congo, where the outbreak remains concentrated.

He cited the example of a Congolese woman who recovered after receiving treatment, despite having been exposed through a family member who later died from the disease.

The President also defended restrictions imposed on passenger movement from the DR Congo, explaining that cargo transport remains operational because truck drivers and their assistants are easier to identify, screen and monitor at border points.

"Cargo requires a driver and a turn boy. These are easy to check. But passengers increase the risk because they move in larger numbers," he said.

Museveni warned that some people continue to cross borders through unofficial routes, making it more difficult for health officials to identify and isolate potential cases. To address the challenge, Uganda and the DR Congo have agreed to strengthen co-operation and establish medical screening points near border communities.

Throughout the address, Museveni repeatedly stressed that controlling Ebola ultimately depends on public co-operation.

He urged Ugandans to abandon practices that increase the risk of infection, including unnecessary physical contact, consumption of bush meat, handling suspected Ebola patients without protection and delaying seeking medical care.

"This disease is easy to stop," Museveni said. "If only people report quickly to the doctors."