

# The overlooked public health risk in Uganda's election season

**EDITOR:** As crowds surge at rallies and campaign events, the energy and enthusiasm easily overshadow basic infection prevention practices.

Many people neglect simple, but essential measures, such as washing hands, using sanitiser, wearing masks and social distancing, creating ideal conditions for germs to spread rapidly.

Uganda's election season is in full swing, filling towns with colour, music and movement. Every day, thousands gather at rallies, processions and campaign events. While these activities celebrate our democracy, they also create perfect conditions for the spread of infections. Germs thrive where people crowd together, shout, cheer and move in large numbers. According to the Ministry of Health, mass gatherings can increase the spread of diseases, such as Mpox, flu, COVID-19, Ebola and cholera if basic precautions are ignored.

Simple, but vital steps, such as washing hands or using sanitiser, avoiding handshakes or hugging in crowded areas, can protect both individuals and communities.

Health workers warn that large gatherings are fertile ground for outbreaks and even small lapses in hygiene can lead to rapid transmission. Illnesses, such as influenza, COVID-19, Mpox and Ebola, among others, spread easily through close contact, shared items, or contaminated surfaces. Diarrhoeal diseases, such as cholera and typhoid are also more common where food is prepared hastily in unhygienic conditions, water is unsafe and handwashing facilities are limited. With increased movement between districts during campaign events, infections can spread more quickly and often go undetected.

During the excitement of campaign activities, many people overlook basic, but essential infection-prevention practices, such as washing hands, using sanitiser, wearing masks and social distancing. At the same time, some ignore early warning symptoms, fever, cough, diarrhoea, vomiting, new skin rashes, or unusual fatigue, assuming they will resolve on their own.

Others avoid seeking care to avoid missing work to support their candidate. This allows infections to spread more widely, putting families, and entire communities at risk. Mpox, for example, continues to appear in several districts nationwide, yet many people still mistake it for other skin conditions or hesitate to seek early medical attention.

The good news is that we can prevent most of these infections through simple, affordable Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) measures. These practices protect individuals and help break transmission. Every Ugandan should take practical steps this campaign season by washing hands with soap or using sanitiser often; avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unclean hands; drink safe water and avoid shared cups or bottles; eat only hot, well-cooked food from clean vendors and avoid handshakes or hugging in crowded places.

These small habits make a big difference. If you experience fever, diarrhoea, vomiting, persistent cough, a rash, or swelling around the neck or armpits, seek care immediately at the nearest health facility. Early treatment protects you, your family and your community.

Every Ugandan has a role to play in promoting safety during this campaign season. Politicians, religious leaders, teachers, youth groups, community leaders and Village Health Teams (VHTs) are essential in reinforcing practical IPC messages. Parents should pay close attention to children, who are more vulnerable in crowded places. Above all, we must avoid stigmatising those who fall sick. Compassion encourages early care seeking and helps stop infections from spreading silently.

Uganda has faced major outbreaks in the past, including Ebola and COVID-19 and we overcame them through unity, vigilance, and collective responsibility. As the election season continues, let us enjoy the excitement of supporting our candidates while protecting ourselves and others. By practising simple IPC measures, choosing safe food and water, limiting unnecessary physical contact and seeking care early, we can keep our families healthy and ensure that the spirit of our democracy does not come at the cost of our well-being.



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