

The task force says the outbreak will not affect the reopening of schools, but administrators must adhere to set standard operating procedures to prevent infections.

BY TONNY ABET

The government has announced a series of stringent measures to prevent further importation of Ebola Virus Disease from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), including the temporary suspension of public transport and direct flights between the two countries, as well as suspension of weekly markets in border areas for four weeks.

Dr Diana Atwine, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health, revealed the decisions at Uganda Media Centre in Kampala yesterday following a meeting of the National Task Force on Ebola. The meeting was led by the Vice President Jessica Alupo.

The move comes after Uganda confirmed two imported cases of the Ebola Bundibugyo virus strain involving Congolese nationals who had been exposed in the DRC. One of the patients died, while the second is being treated in the Ebola treatment centre in Kampala.

Ebola: Govt suspends cross-border markets

"We are temporarily suspending the public passenger services on ferries, on Semliki River, the cross-border bus transport and all public transport between the DRC and Uganda for four weeks," Dr Atwine said.

She added, "But this is with the exception of goods and food and any other cargo that is being transported across the border. We shall be able to reconvene, assess the risk and we will guide accordingly."

Dr Atwine also announced new measures on flights and movement of people between the two countries. "We are suspending all flights to and from the DRC to Uganda, and this takes effect within 48 hours. We are going to enhance border security patrols along the porous borders to minimise unnecessary cross-border movements," she said.

"We shall continue to facilitate only essential movements of population across borders for people originating from the DRC, limiting it to only gazetted and designated crossing points. This means we will not want to encourage people to use porous borders to come from Congo to Uganda and that's why we are enhancing the security patrols,"

Dr Atwine added.

Markets and gatherings

The task force also resolved to temporarily suspend all cultural celebrations and commemorations that attract big numbers of participants along the DRC-Uganda border.

"And this particular one, we know that Obundhingiya (in Bundibugyo area) will be celebrating their anniversary, and we are advising that they postpone

this until we are out of this (Ebola outbreak)," Dr Atwine explained.

"As you know, Bundibugyo is right next to the DRC, and, therefore, that will cause a lot of mass movements. So, we are advising that we postpone that function," she added.

Dr Atwine also said weekly markets will not be operational in the high-risk districts for four weeks.

"We have suspended all weekly markets in the border sub-counties of the high-risk districts for the next four weeks as we continue to assess the risk of Ebola transmission in our neighbourhood," she said.

"We encourage and we continue to call upon everybody, not only in the high-risk districts but all of us, to enforce standard operating procedures in non-weekly markets in all border districts along DRC, including schools, prisons, hotels and places of worship."

According to Dr Atwine, although the main focus is on the border districts, the government wants to see this happen in "all our districts in the country."

Schools

According to the task force, the out-

break will not affect the reopening of schools, but administrators must adhere to set standard operating procedures (SOPs) to prevent infections.

Dr Atwine noted that some children cross from the DRC to Uganda to study, adding that the learning of these children will not be interrupted.

"We know that schools are going to open and we shall open on time. School opening will not postpone, but we advise the headteachers and the ministry of education to ensure that all the SOPs we have issued are followed to the dot because we know schools are crowded and they bring together many people across the country," she said.

"But we are calling upon the school administration to be more vigilant, to ensure that all our children who develop symptoms are linked to our medical teams within the area to ensure that we test and isolate them if they are infected," she added.

The other preventive measures include increasing screening and testing, increasing sensitisation and awareness creation about Ebola, and enhanced death reporting to detect Ebola in communities.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

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