

# Ebola outbreak: Schools should abide by SOPs

**T**he Ministry of Health this week issued guidelines for schools as academic institutions reopen next week for the second term amid an Ebola outbreak.

Among the measures, according to the ministry's Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to guide prevention and control of Ebola Virus Disease, are having handwashing facilities with clean running water and soap at school entrances, classrooms, dormitories, dining areas, toilets, and staff rooms.

The other includes establishing temperature screening points at school entrances, restricting entry for persons with Ebola symptoms, regularly cleaning and disinfecting classrooms, dormitories, toilets and bathrooms, dining halls, school vehicles and frequently touched surfaces, as well as ensuring proper waste management and disposal.

## The issue:

Ebola outbreak.

## Our view:

The SOPs provided by the Ministry of Health should be strictly followed since schools remain high concentration points.

The ministry has also discouraged handshakes, hugging, and sharing personal items, urging schools and institutions to keep classrooms and dormitories well ventilated by opening windows and doors where possible. The ministry has urged schools to designate an isolation area for suspected cases and ensure the availability of supplies such as soap, water, hand sanitisers, and thermometers.

Uganda is currently on high alert following the confirmation of two unrelated, imported cases of the rare Ebola Bundibugyo strain in Kampala. The outbreak, which originated in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), prompted the World Health Organisation (WHO) to declare

a public health emergency of international concern, the second-highest alert level.

Because the Bundibugyo strain has no approved vaccines or targeted clinical therapeutics, containment relies entirely on aggressive surveillance, contact tracing, and public compliance with preventative protocols.

The government reacted by, among others, cancelling this year's June 3 Martyrs' Day celebrations to prevent disease from spreading among the millions of faithful who descend on the shrines.

Uganda has, over the years, built its capacity to manage epidemics and outbreaks such as this. However, doctors and surveillance teams cannot stand alone. To prevent the disease from spreading further and keep schools open, every institution must comply with these SOPs.

As Covid-19 started causing havoc around the world at the beginning of 2020, Uganda closed its schools for nearly two years as a pre-emptive strike to eliminate high concentration points. The measure affected approximately 15 million learners across 51,000 educational institutions.

We do not want to see this doomsday scenario repeated. The 2014 to 2016 West Africa Ebola epidemic should serve as a reminder that if not handled properly, an Ebola outbreak can decimate entire communities and overwhelm regional healthcare networks.

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