

# Ebola cases increase amid fear of cross-border spread

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BY TONY ABET

**E**bola Virus Disease caseload is swelling in Uganda, with three new confirmed cases, as health authorities battle fears of further cross-border spread from growing cases in DR Congo.

The new cases reported over the weekend bring Uganda's cumulative number of infections with the Ebola Bundibugyo strain to five, according to the Ministry of Health. The three new cases were from a driver, a health worker, and a Congolese woman who travelled to Kampala for treatment.

This indicates that the majority of the cases are imported. But over 120 health workers and contacts of Ebola patients have been in institutional quarantine in Uganda since last week, where they are being monitored.

Some people test positive for Ebola later, as they are under quarantine, because the virus has an incubation period of two to 21 days, the time it takes for symptoms to manifest.

As the outbreak situation unfolds in Uganda and the DR Congo, the Government of Uganda hosted separate high-level meetings on Friday and Saturday with Ambassadors, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), and the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The discussions focused on fast-tracking containment measures, strengthening cross-border surveillance and securing additional resources to curb the outbreak in the two countries.

During the Friday morning meeting in Kampala, the Ministry of Health indicated that it needs more than Shs90 billion for the response. Dr Diana Atwine, the Permanent Secretary of the ministry, also observed that the actual financial requirement will be much higher than Shs90 billion, given the evolving situation of the outbreak, describing Shs90 billion as "a drop in the ocean."

The money will mostly be spent on case management (treatment), risk communication and community engagement, logistics, contact tracing, and



Red Cross workers disinfect Rwampara general hospital before handling the body of a person who died of Ebola, as aid agencies intensify efforts to contain a new Ebola outbreak involving the Bundibugyo strain, in Rwampara outside Bunia, Ituri province, Democratic Republic of Congo, on Thursday. PHOTO/REUTERS

coordination.

Foreign countries (like the USA and European Union), and agencies like the Africa CDC and the WHO have already committed around Shs130 billion to support the Ebola response in DR Congo and Uganda.

This reporter could not readily determine how much is specifically for Uganda. The Friday meeting in Kampala was, among other reasons, meant to harmonise issues around funding and how the government and partners would handle it.

The government had previously appealed that the money for interventions within the country should be channelled through the government system, not to implementers, as some donors were doing.

The government said this would enable the money to go to actual areas of need, improve efficiency and ensure the effective use of resources. But some of the donors had reportedly previously raised concerns around transparen-

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cy and corruption in the government system.

In a statement, Dr Atwine, in the Friday morning meeting with ambassadors, heads of missions, and development partners to brief them on Ebola, emphasised following one plan, one budget and one monitoring and evaluation framework. Dr Atwine also called

for "mutual accountability, transparency and clarity to the government."

Dr Atwine expressed Uganda's willingness to support the DRC with technical experience in reducing transmission to reduce the loss of lives due to Ebola. "Uganda will never export Ebola; that is our commitment and pledge. We must support our neighbours in putting up systems," Dr Atwine said.

### Response coordination centre

President Yoweri Museveni, on the same day in the afternoon, also received a high-level delegation from the Africa CDC at State House, Entebbe. The Africa CDC proposed to establish a continental coordination centre for the Ebola Incident Management Support Team in Kampala. "I met a delegation from the Africa Centres for Disease Control (CDC) led by Director General, Dr Jean Kaseya, who briefed me on the regional Ebola situation and the measures being taken to ensure Uganda remains protected," President Museveni

said. "They proposed establishing a continental Incident Management Support Team for Ebola in Kampala to strengthen regional coordination and monitoring efforts, which Uganda welcomes and will support."

Dr Kaseya stated: "We discussed the Ebola situation in the region and the importance of a strong, coordinated and united African response."

"I congratulated Uganda for its rapid and effective response to the outbreak. Following our cross-border meeting with ministers of health of the DRC, Uganda, and South Sudan, Africa will have one common plan to guide our collective response to this threat, a threat which we will most certainly overcome together," he added.

Mr Museveni expressed confidence in the ability of the country and continent to manage the threat, saying, "With proper attention and preparedness, Ebola is very manageable."

### Eleven resolutions made

On Saturday, Uganda also hosted a high-level ministerial meeting on cross-border coordination for the Ebola outbreak response at Speke Resort Munyonyo. The countries in attendance—Uganda, DR Congo, and South Sudan, agreed on urgent 11 actions to curb the outbreak and have a sustainable plan for future eventualities.

In the joint communique, the parties agreed to strengthen cross-border surveillance, early warning systems and harmonise points of entry preparedness and population mobility monitoring.

The other areas were protecting frontline and vulnerable communities, strengthening community engagement, strengthening clinical management and infection prevention and control, and strengthening risk communication and community engagement, operational coordination and incident management.

Mobilising sustainable financing and operational support, strengthening regional preparedness and health security, sustaining high-level political leadership and regional solidarity and advancing long-term regional health security were part of the resolutions made.