

Vigilance in schools, communities key to stopping Ebola spread

UGANDA'S decision to give schools until Monday to fully implement Ebola prevention standard operating procedures is both timely and necessary. With the neighbouring DR Congo still battling a deadly Ebola Bundibugyo epidemic that has claimed hundreds of lives, the risk of cross-border spread is real.

The World Health Organisation has already declared the outbreak an international emergency, a signal that no country in the region can afford complacency. No wonder, schools sit at the intersection of this risk. They tend to be crowded social environments where children, teachers, and support staff interact daily. A single undetected case could move quickly through classrooms, dormitories, and homes.

That is why the Government's directive to establish hand-washing facilities, screening points, and temporary isolation areas for suspected cases, is not excessive, but rather the bare minimum for responsible preparedness.

The measures themselves are practical and proven. Learners and staff have been advised against hugging, handshakes, and sharing personal belongings. These are



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small behavioural adjustments with outsized impact in breaking transmission chains.

More importantly, the directive requires immediate reporting of any learner or staff member showing Ebola-like symptoms to district surveillance teams and health authorities.

Early detection and rapid isolation remain Uganda's strongest weapons against an outbreak spiralling out of control.

What gives weight to this directive is Uganda's track record. The country has, over the years, built a reputation for containing Ebola and other epidemic threats through decisive, community-based responses. From the 2000 Gulu outbreak to more recent flare-ups, the lesson has been consistent: speed, co-ordination, and public compliance save lives. The current school directive draws directly from that experience. It is not a panic measure; it is a calibrated step rooted in institutional memory.

However, directives on paper mean little without execution. Headteachers, boards of governors, and district education officers must treat Monday's deadline as firm. Parents, too, have a role to play. They should reinforce hygiene practices at home and ensure children understand why these rules matter, without stoking fear or stigma. While misinformation tends to spread faster than viruses in such moments, schools must be spaces of calm, factual guidance.