

Uganda's Ebola caseload rises to 16 as outbreak spreads

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Members of Doctors Without Borders (Medecins Sans Frontieres, or MSF) set up an Ebola treatment isolation unit at the Mubende regional referral hospital in Uganda on September 24, 2022 [Badru Katumba/AFP]

Kampala, September 26 (RHC)-- A total of 16 people have contracted the highly contagious Ebola virus in Uganda, while a further 18 people also likely had the disease, health officials in the east African country said. Four people have already died from the virus, raising fears of a spreading outbreak that involves a strain for which a vaccine has not yet been found. The outbreak has now spread to three districts, all in

central Uganda.

“The Ministry of Health Rapid Response Teams remain on ground to list and follow up contacts to the confirmed cases,” the ministry said on Sunday, urging increased vigilance. Authorities first declared an outbreak, attributed to the relatively rare Ebola Sudan strain, in the central district of Mubende around the beginning of September. The first casualty was a 24-year-old man who died earlier this week.

Travel restrictions on non-essential work and a ban on large public gatherings have already been imposed in Mubende, said health ministry spokeswoman Emma Ainebyoona. In 2019, Uganda experienced an outbreak of Ebola Zaire. The virus was imported from neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was battling a large epidemic in its northeastern region.

Ebola is a haemorrhagic fever whose symptoms include intense body weakness, muscle pain, headache and sore throat, vomiting, diarrhoea and rashes among others. The death rate is typically high, ranging up to 90 percent in some outbreaks, according to the World Health Organization. First identified in 1976 in the DRC – then called Zaire – the virus, whose natural host is the bat, has since set off a series of epidemics in Africa, killing about 15,000 people.

Human transmission of ebola is through body fluids, with fever, vomiting, bleeding and diarrhoea the main symptoms. Outbreaks are difficult to contain, especially in urban environments. People who are infected do not become contagious until symptoms appear, which is after an incubation period of between two and 21 days.

At present, there is no licensed medication to prevent or treat Ebola, although a range of experimental drugs are in development and thousands have been vaccinated in the DRC and some neighbouring countries. The WHO says the Ebola Sudan strain is less transmissible and has shown a lower fatality rate in previous outbreaks than Ebola Zaire, a strain that killed nearly 2,300 people in the 2018-2020 epidemic in the DRC.

The worst epidemic in West Africa between 2013 and 2016 killed more than 11,300 people.

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