

Ebola outbreak in central Uganda kills at least 3

-, 19.11.2012, 05:42 Time

USPA News - A new outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus has claimed the lives of at least three people in central Uganda, health authorities said on Saturday. It is the third outbreak of the disease so far this year, following deadly outbreaks in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Laboratory investigations at the Uganda Virus Research Institute in Entebbe confirmed that two of the victims died of the Sudan strain of Ebola, while no samples were available for testing from the third victim. All three victims were known to each other, and two of them were from the same family. Uganda's health ministry said the first case involved a boda-boda bicycle taxi rider who died on October 25 after presenting signs of high fever while bleeding from various body parts, though he did not seek medical treatment. The second death involved a 25-year-old woman who had cared for the man. The young woman died on November 10 at Nyimbwa Health Center IV, located in Luweero District, after presenting symptoms of Ebola. A family member of the woman died two days later with similar symptoms, and one person who cared for them has since been admitted to Bombo Military Hospital after also falling ill. Due to the latest outbreak, the isolation facility at Mulago hospital in the capital Kampala has been reactivated while another isolation facility has been established at Nyimbwa Health Center IV. "Seven close contacts of the cases have developed symptoms and are being isolated in the isolation facilities," the World Health Organization (WHO) said in a statement. A team of experts from WHO, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET), and the Ugandan health ministry are on the ground to prevent the disease from spreading. National authorities have also set up a national taskforce to coordinate the government's response. "The Ministry of Health is confident that the outbreak will be effectively controlled and there should be no panic among the population," said health minister Christine Odoia. "The Ministry of Health once again calls upon the public to stay calm as all possible measures are being undertaken to control the situation. The country will be kept informed further on the outcome of the health emergency." Ebola is a highly infectious disease and kills its victims in a very short time, but the virus can easily be confused with many other diseases. The signs and symptoms include high grade fever, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, headache, measles-like rash, red eyes, and in some cases bleeding from body openings. The virus, for which there is no cure or vaccine, can spread through direct contact with body fluids such as saliva, blood, stool, vomit, urine and sweat, but also through soiled linen used by an infected person. It can also spread by using skin piercing instruments previously used by an infected person or by touching the dead body of a person who died of Ebola. Usually a rare disease, there have been three deadly outbreaks this year alone. Seventeen people were killed in midwestern Uganda in July when Ebola spread among mostly family members and health care workers in the village of Nyanswiga. It was followed by an outbreak in the northeastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in August, killing at least 36 people. Before the outbreaks in DR Congo and Uganda, the last known case of Ebola was reported in May 2011 when a 12-year-old girl died in a town near the Ugandan capital of Kampala. Despite initial fears of an epidemic, and the Kenyan Ministry of Health issuing an alert to people living near the Ugandan border, no other cases were recorded.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-250/ebola-outbreak-in-central-uganda-kills-at-least-3.html>

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