

UNRA suspends Panyimur ferry

NEBBI

By Benedict Okethwengu

The Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) has suspended ferry operations on the Panyimur-Wanseko landing routes on Lake Albert, following a suspected outbreak of cholera in Nebbi district.

The suspension follows the death of a UNRA staff member identified as Rashid Jamal, 36, a resident of Maracha district, who is said to have succumbed to the disease.

Mark Ssali, the UNRA head of public and corporate affairs, told *New Vision* on Saturday that the suspension took effect on Friday.

Ssali said they are working closely with the Ministry of Health and that once the situation is contained, the ferry services will be restored.

"Cholera is highly contagious, so we are taking preventive measures by suspending the ferry," he said.

A number of passengers seeking to cross to Wanseko in Bulisa district have resorted to using canoes and motorboats to cross the lake.

Linus Amule, who heads Panyimur Health Centre III, said they are overwhelmed by the number of

patients suspected to be suffering from cholera.

He added that two people have so far died and over 50 patients have been admitted to the health centre.

Amule said due to the increasing number of patients, they have exhausted the Intravenous fluids and patients are being forced to buy from private clinics.

He said treating cholera is expensive, noting that a patient may use up not less than 20 bottles of IV fluid a day, yet a bottle of IV fluid costs about sh2,000, an amount the poor may not be able to afford.

Cholera is an infection of the small intestine caused by the bacterium *vibrio cholerae*. The main symptoms are profuse, watery diarrhoea and vomiting. Its transmission occurs primarily by drinking water or eating food that has been contaminated by the faeces of an infected person.

CHOLERA AT A GLANCE

"The situation is alarming. We are receiving five to seven patients each day. The biggest worry now is IV fluid and antibiotics which are running out," he said.

According to Amule, the first case was reported at Angumu village on Wednesday, before spreading to other villages of Nyaloi, Adundu, Rwanga (ferry landing site) and Nyakagei in Panyimur sub-county.

He said: "We suspect it could have originated from Congo because the first victim came from Congo to attend a funeral here in Panyimur sub-county."

Before the suspected outbreak in Panyimur, the district was struggling to contain a similar outbreak in Parombo, which has left over 40 people admitted to the health centre since January.

Dr Jakor Oryema, the Nebbi district health officer, could neither deny nor confirm the outbreak of the disease in the district.

"We have collected samples from the patients and the results are not yet out so, I cannot say there is an outbreak," he said.

Health experts argue that cholera is persisting in the district due to poor sanitary facilities in the community.

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