

SCHOOLS GIVEN ONE WEEK TO **ENFORCE** EBOLA SOPs

By Lawrence Mulondo

By Monday, all schools across Uganda must fully implement all Ebola prevention standard operating procedures (SOPs), the education ministry has ordered.

The directive was issued by the ministry's permanent secretary, Dr Kedrace Turyagyenda, on Monday during the launch of the Proliferation of Local Expertise in the Development of Green Growth Economy (PLEDGE) project at the National Council for Higher Education offices in Kampala.

Turyagyenda said all schools and institutions must urgently put in place the basic preventive measures required to curb the spread of Ebola.

"By the end of this week, all schools and institutions should have the basics that can help us ensure the SOPs are observed," she said.

The directive comes as neighbouring DR Congo continues to battle a deadly



A school security guard checking a student temperature at Busoga College Mwiri on Monday. The ministry has ordered schools to enforce SOPs

Ebola Bundibugyo epidemic that has claimed more than 200 lives. The World Health Organisation has since declared the outbreak an international public health emergency amid fears that the virus may have circulated

undetected for weeks before authorities confirmed the epidemic in eastern DR Congo.

By press time, the number of Ebola cases in Uganda had risen to seven after two cases of health workers were confirmed on Monday.

Turyagyenda said the Government was particularly concerned because schools had just reopened and some institutions might not yet have fully prepared themselves to enforce the required health measures.

PHOTO BY DONALD KIIRYA

THE **SOPs**

Under the new directives issued by the health ministry of, schools are required to establish hand-washing facilities, screening points and temporary isolation areas for suspected cases.

Learners and staff have also been advised against handshakes, hugging and sharing personal belongings.

School administrators have further been instructed to immediately report any learner or staff member showing Ebola-like symptoms to district surveillance teams and health authorities for rapid assessment and possible isolation.

She reminded Ugandans of the devastating effects of previous Ebola outbreaks,

especially the 2001 and 2002 epidemics that left many families grieving.

The permanent secretary noted that the health ministry had already shared Ebola prevention Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) with the education sector and urged all school administrators to strictly adhere to them.

"We implore all head teachers, leaders of tertiary institutions and school managers to ensure these SOPs are followed. We want to stay alive and remain safe. It is cheaper to prevent than to treat," she added.

AUTHORITIES PREPARED

Despite the growing concern, health authorities maintain that Uganda has the technical expertise and response systems necessary to contain the outbreak.

Officials cite the country's previous successful responses to Ebola, Marburg and other infectious disease outbreaks as evidence of its preparedness.