

GOVT DECENTRALISES EBOLA TESTING

Leaders at the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) have said the government is decentralising Ebola Virus Disease testing to Arua and Kasese to improve response to outbreaks.

Dr Stephen Balinandi, a virologist and the manager of the reference laboratory for Viral Hemorrhagic Fever at UVRI, told *Daily Monitor* that the testing of Ebola virus in West Nile started on Wednesday.

"Uganda has been getting these outbreaks more frequently, the government has expanded the testing facilities. Now there is a laboratory here at Uganda Virus Research Institute, there is another laboratory at Wandegaya (Kampala) under the Central Public Health Laboratories," he said.

Dr Balinandi said the focus is now on strengthening testing capacity outside the central region. "We are focusing on upcountry facilities. As of today (Wednesday), testing capacity is being activated in Arua to

handle suspected Ebola samples within the region," he said.

"So, samples will no longer be coming to Kampala or Entebbe for testing. Another lab is being activated at Bwera Hospital in Kasese to cater for samples, especially from western Uganda and the western border to DR Congo," he added. He said this would greatly reduce turnaround time for test results, an essential factor in the disease response.

"It has always been difficult to bring samples to the centre (Kam-

pala and Entebbe) from upcountry patients. This is an effort to make sure that the turnaround time for results is shortened," he said.

"When we started these activities many years ago, it would take weeks; it eventually reduced to a day or two. Right now, we are looking at hours. Within six hours, the results should be out. We have cut off the transportation time from Kasese or Arua to Entebbe, which could be 8 to 12 hours," he added.

Prof Pontiano Kaleebu, the UVRI director, said the response to

Ebola outbreaks has improved over the years. He said interventions, including a shorter turnaround time for results, have resulted in fewer deaths and faster containment of the deadly disease.

"Uganda is ahead, we're doing a lot, and I'm very hopeful the disease will not spread. We have to be cautious," he said. "Already at the borders, the government is working very closely to see that there's no importation of this [virus]," he added.

By Tonny Abet