

Uganda orders Marburg screening after Tanzania outbreak

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Uganda has ordered health officials to step up screening along its border with Tanzania following a deadly outbreak of the Marburg virus in the neighbouring country.

Tanzania on Tuesday said five people had died after contracting the highly dangerous virus which causes severe fever and is often accompanied by bleeding and organ failure.

In a letter sent to all district health officers on Wednesday and seen by AFP, Uganda's director general of [health services](#), Henry Mwebesa, instructed officials to be "on the lookout" for the disease.

He asked officials in all districts bordering Tanzania to "start screening all in-bound passengers at points of entry" for symptoms, urging them to carry out his orders "with immediate effect".

In addition to the five victims in Tanzania, three patients are receiving treatment in hospital and 161 contacts are being traced by the authorities, the Tanzanian health ministry said on Tuesday, urging citizens to remain calm.

Tanzania last week sent a [rapid response team](#) to its northwestern region of Kagera which borders Uganda to probe a mysterious illness which it later identified as Marburg haemorrhagic fever.

The Marburg virus is part of the so-called filovirus family that also

includes Ebola, which has wreaked havoc in Africa.

Uganda, which shares a porous border with Tanzania, witnessed its last Marburg outbreak in 2017.

The East African nation has just emerged from an almost four-month-long Ebola outbreak, which killed 55 people before Kampala declared an end to it in January.

The suspected natural source of the Marburg virus is the African fruit bat, which carries the pathogen but does not fall sick from it.

The virus takes its name from the German city of Marburg, where it was first identified in 1967, in a lab where workers had been in contact with infected green monkeys imported from Uganda.

The animals can pass the virus to primates in [close proximity](#), including humans, and human-to-human transmission then occurs through contact with blood or other body fluids.

Fatality rates in confirmed cases have ranged from 24 percent to 88 percent in previous outbreaks, depending on the virus strain and case management, according to the World Health Organization.

There are currently no vaccines or antiviral treatments, but potential treatments, including blood products, immune therapies and drug therapies, as well as early candidate vaccines are being evaluated, the WHO says.

Tanzania's outbreak coincides with cases in the West African state of Equatorial Guinea. Previous outbreaks and sporadic cases have been reported in South Africa, Angola, Kenya, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

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