

Ebola prevalence worries Rwandans

Kigali, Thursday

SURVEILLANCE systems have been strengthened at all entry points into Rwanda and hospitals following reports that Ebola had been detected in the Nigerian capital Lagos last week.

The virus has so far claimed at least 670 people in West African countries mainly Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Rwandans have reason to worry because the national carrier, RwandaAir, operates direct flights to Lagos.

Speaking to The New Times yesterday, Nathan Mugume, the head of the communication division at Rwanda Biomedical Centre, said they are working closely with Rwanda Civil Aviation Authority on precautionary measures.

"We have developed fact

sheets on the disease. They spell out all about the disease, the best reaction if a case is detected, and much more. We have a very good surveillance system used to monitor epidemics," Mugume said.

He, however, said that despite measures put in place, the incubation period of the Ebola virus is an issue of concern, because it incubates within a period of two to 21 days, meaning it can slip into the country undetected.

The incubation period is the time between exposure to an infectious agent and when symptoms and signs are first apparent.

"It is important to understand that the virus' detection period can go up to 21 days, implying that if somebody was infected and left Nigeria today, they wouldn't be detected until after 21 days," he

said.

Tony Barigye, the spokesman for the RCAA, said they have kept an eye on the Ebola outbreak since the first case was reported in Guinea in February.

Barigye said the RCAA, in partnership with Ministry of Health, has for the last two months emphasised communication and public awareness.

Information kits have been designed including pull-up banners and over 2,000 flyers have been distributed at the Kigali International Airport.

"We have also reviewed the infrastructure in place (airport clinic) and proposed recommendations on how to adapt the facility in case of an outbreak," Barigye said.

The recommendations include having the airport clinic open 24/7 and an ambulance on standby for 24 hours.