

AS part of the critical measures needed to ward off the deadly Ebola virus which is likely to threaten the country, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare has started to train health workers at Muhimbili National Hospital (MNH) on preventive strategies.

An emergency medicine Physician at MNH, Dr Juma Mfinanga, said that the training is aimed at equipping medical doctors, nurses and other service providers in the hospital with requisite knowledge concerning the disease.

"The disease has not been detected in the country but prevention is better than cure. The seminar will offer medical skills that will enable physicians to detect anyone with the disease easily," he said.

Dr Mfinanga added that the seminar will be conducted for seven days, adding that trained health workers are expected to be teachers of people out there some of whom might have wrong perceptions regarding the disease.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans with outbreaks that have a case fatality rate of up to 90 per cent.

The virus is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads in the human population through human-to-human transmission with infection resulting from direct contact (through broken skin or mucous membranes) with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected people and indirect contact with environments contaminated with such fluids.

Ebola has claimed about 1,000 lives in West Africa so far. Although no cases of Ebola have been reported in Tanzania, health officials are taking precautions seriously.

Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Dr Seif Rashid last week advised Tanzanians to postpone all travel to countries where Ebola has been detected.

Speaking about the preparation of guidelines for isolation units, Dr Mfinanga said that, they have designated special tents at MUHAS football ground where people who are suspected or confirmed will be looked after before being taken to Temeke national isolation centre.

A specialist on infectious diseases, Dr Simon Ntabaguzi, said during the training for doctors that there was no need for medical workers to run away but equip themselves with knowledge and save the lives of victims.

"It is important for patients to receive supportive therapy as there is no cure for the disease but it is manageable," elaborated Dr Ntabaguzi.

Dr Ntabaguzi said that as part of enhancing the preparedness measures, the MNH has developed a plan, designated an isolation unit and pre-positioned Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for use by its frontline staff in high risk situations.

The outbreak began in Guinea in March before spreading to neighbouring Sierra Leone and Liberia.

A traveller recently carried it farther, to Nigeria, leading to a few cases in the giant city of Lagos.

Ebola emerged in 1976. It has been confirmed in 10 African nations, but never before in the region of West Africa.