

Nigeria declares national emergency over Ebola

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Nigeria's president declared a national emergency on Friday over the deadly Ebola virus that has claimed two lives in Africa's most populous country.

"President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Friday in Abuja declared the control and containment of the Ebola virus in Nigeria, a national emergency," his office said in a statement.

The president called on the population to avoid large gatherings in order to prevent the spread of the virus.

"Religious and political groups, spiritual healing centres, families, associations and other bodies should ... discourage gatherings and activities that may unwittingly promote close contact with infected persons or place others at risk," said the presidency.

Jonathan also approved the immediate release of 1.9 billion naira (\$11.6 million, 8.7 million euros) to fund measures against the spread of the virus.

Among measures to be undertaken include the setting up of additional isolation centres, screening at borders and contact tracing.

In addition, the president warned against any movement of corpses in the country.

"Every death should be reported to the relevant authorities, and special precautions should be taken in handling corpses," said the presidency in the statement.

Nigeria confirmed five new cases of Ebola in Lagos and a second death from the virus on Wednesday, bringing the total number of infections in sub-Saharan Africa's largest city to seven.

He warned the public to desist from spreading false information about Ebola virus "which can lead to mass hysteria, panic and misdirection, including unverified suggestions about prevention, treatment, cure and spread of the virus."

One such rumour that went viral in chain messages on phones and on the internet in the past 24 hours across Nigeria suggested that a salt and hot water combination can prevent or possibly cure the deadly virus.

Health experts on Friday debunked this claim.

Jonathan appealed to authorities of public and private schools to consider the option of extending current school holiday "until such a time when national reassessment of the level of the Ebola is conducted."

He said that medical workers should regard his declaration of the national emergency as a patriotic call to duty and service, the statement said.

It is unclear if public sector doctors have resumed work after the president of the union on Thursday announced the suspension of their pay strike which began on July 1.

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