



# PARLIAMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

Parliament Building - O.A.U Drive, Tower Hill, Freetown | [admin@parliament.gov.sl](mailto:admin@parliament.gov.sl) | [www.parliament.gov.sl](http://www.parliament.gov.sl)

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## PRESS RELEASE



### HEALTH MINISTER GIVES STATUS UPDATE ON MPOX IN PARLIAMENT, DEVISES PLANS TO BREAK CHAIN OF TRANSMISSION

Pursuant to Section 107 subsection 2 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, the Parliament of Sierra Leone on Tuesday 13/05/2025 summoned the Minister of Health, Dr. Austin Demby to brief Parliament and the General Public about the preparedness of the health systems amid Mpox outbreak in Sierra Leone.

Explaining to Members of Parliament, the Minister described the issue as a serious concern. He said that with the support of Parliament, Sierra Leone would handle the Mpox outbreak. He said the outbreak started in January 2025 with two cases, which has now escalated to more than two thousand cases in the country as of May 2025.

The Minister also said that Mpox is a virus that transfers through body contact. He said a major solution to preventing the cases is by avoiding direct body contact and that regular hand washing could also be a major way to prevent the transmission of the disease outbreak.

Speaking on vaccination, the Minister said that the vaccine is an additional way to prevent the spread of the outbreak within the country. The Minister added that Mpox cases are rising because

the people and communities are not complying with the professional healthcare directives. He said the outbreak gets worse on a daily basis because of failure by people to adhere to these directives from medical practitioners. He informed that Sierra Leone has about 63,000 Mpox vaccines currently in the country.

Minister Demby continued saying that people with Mpox should be removed from their residents to a better healthcare facility for comprehensive treatments.

"With support from Parliament and the Public, Sierra Leone healthcare systems will be one of the best in the world," he said. He also informed Members of Parliament that not too long from now, the Ministry of Health will come up with healthcare regulations for all Sierra Leoneans.

The Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee on Health, Hon. Bernadette Wuyatta Songa said Sierra Leone has one of the best preparedness for healthcare emergencies in the country. She continued that all the country needed was the right policies and legislations to ensure the healthcare systems were improved.

She said that one of the major activities that needs to be undertaken by the Ministry is regular public education and awareness raising on the health situations in the country. Hon. Songa furthered that Sierra Leone is not well-known for approaching people to provide comprehensive education on the Mpox outbreak in the country. On the health condition of Members of Parliament, she said the bloated overseas treatments were a major concern that Parliament needs to investigate,". The Ministry of Health has been supportive to Parliament, though at slow pace. Mr. Speaker, we are doing well as a nation regarding our healthcare systems, " she concluded.

Hon. Unpha Sorie Koroma asked a series of questions and called to adhere to the preventive directives from the Ministry of Health in order to address the challenges of Mpox. He said if proper education and awareness are not done to those communities, the efforts of the Ministry would go in vain. He therefore encouraged the Ministry to ensure comprehensive education regarding Mpox outbreak is done nationwide." The vaccine is a good step in the right direction, but it would not stop you from getting the virus and much more needs to be done in our health sector," he said.

Hon. Bashiru Silikie said, based on research, there seems to be no clear medication for Mpox. He also noted that there is no vaccine for under 12 years old. He ended by asking for the plans the Ministry had for children who could not be vaccinated.

Hon. Mustapha Fayia Sellu from Moyamba District asked about the mechanisms used to combat Mpox at the initial stage. He also asked the Minister whether there are any specific treatments for Mpox? He concluded by saying that Ebola was handled and curtailed in Sierra Leone through a community based approach. He asked what the Ministry has done and / or is doing by engaging the public regarding Mpox.

Hon. Abdul Karim Kamara from Kambia District challenged some claims made by the Minister. He highlighted major challenges to curtailing Mpox outbreak in Sierra Leone. He said there is a need to revitalize the ambulance systems in the country. He noted that the National Emergency Medical Services (NEMS) is nearly dead and has not effectively been functioning in the country. The Hon. Member from Kambia intimated that Members of Parliament are asking for health

insurance and not necessarily overseas travels for medical treatments. "Ministry of Health should not be begging the Ministry of Finance for the health conditions of our people" he said. He encouraged the Ministry to ensure those selling unlawful medications (drug peddlers) on the streets are decisively dealt with as provided for by law. The issuance of pincodes is a major challenge in the health sector, and that has to be addressed by the Ministry,"he said.

Hon. Quintin Salia-Konneh, in his contribution, said the situation to dealing with Mpox is a difficult one that requires more attention by the state. He said setting treatment centres for Mpox outbreak is capital intensive. He therefore expressed concerns about the available resources to operate those treatment centres.

Hon. Mariama Bangura said the disease leaves no one untouched and therefore it should not be politicised," the life of our people is in danger particularly in the slum communities,"she said.

The Opposition Leader II, Hon. Aaron Aruna Koroma acknowledged in his debate that the outbreak is indeed a major concern in Sierra Leone. He decried the Ministry for claiming that they had applied much seriousness for curing Mpox outbreak in the country. He said the Ministry should make hand washing and other health directives compulsory to the public in order to curtail the Mpox outbreak in the country."NEMS and the Ambulances were meant to resolve some major challenges in the health sector, but that has not been forthcoming," he said.

Rounding up the debate on the part of the Opposition Leader, Hon. Abdul Kargbo said that the Ministry needs to do much more to address issues around the Mpox outbreak. He called on the Ministry to engage religious and traditional leaders to ensure effective education on the Mpox outbreak. He encouraged the Ministry through community leaders to initiate byelaws to mitigate the spread of the virus in the country. He said the state should invest in getting more vaccines in order to ensure the safety of everyone, including the Members of Parliament.

"Let us ask and plead to experts for technical support in combating the virus," he said. He added that Sierra Leone needs to be more cautious in various cross-border points in order to prevent the escalation of the virus.

Rounding the debate, Majority Leader and Leader of Government Business, Hon. Mathew Sahr Nyuma said the government is committed to combating the virus in the country. Hon. Nyuma said that the government would do regional engagements to ensure the Mpox outbreak is curtailed nationwide."We need to change our mindset regarding the health sector,"he said.

In a question and comments session, the Majority Leader and Leader of Government Business, Hon. Mathew Sahr Nyuma raised many concerns regarding the Mpox outbreak and asked the following questions: Why the rapid increment in Western Area cases and what could be done to break the chain of transmission or completely eradicate the outbreak in the country? he inquired.

In another development, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Alpha Sesay, also used the ministerial statements to explain to Members of Parliament and the Public on the status of Legal Aid Board and its contributions towards the justice system in the country. The Minister highlighted key achievements and challenges of the institution.

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