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## **STATEMENT BY THE HON. MINISTER FOR HEALTH ON THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

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1 JULY 2025 | PARLIAMENT HOUSE, ACCRA

Right Honourable Speaker,

Honourable Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to update this House - and through you, the people of Ghana - on a recent development at the University of Ghana that has attracted national attention.

### 1. Background: What's Happening?

Mr. Speaker, while COVID-19 is no longer regarded as a global health emergency, it has not disappeared. Like many other viruses, we anticipate it to flare up occasionally, especially during certain seasons. In recent weeks, our national disease surveillance system detected an increase in cases at the University of Ghana. **These cases have been traced to a familiar variant - the Omicron sub-variant - which we have managed before. It spreads easily, but fortunately, it usually causes mild illness.**

### **How the cases were detected: Ghana's robust surveillance system**

Mr. Speaker, the recent COVID-19 cases are localised at the University of Ghana community only. I am proud to inform this House that the cases were detected through Ghana's influenza surveillance system and confirmed by the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research. This national network of sentinel sites operates across all 16 regions.

While many countries have scaled down or even stopped routine COVID-19 testing, Ghana has continued to integrate COVID-19 monitoring into its broader surveillance of respiratory viruses. This foresight and commitment to preparedness allowed us to detect the current outbreak early and respond swiftly. It is a clear demonstration of Ghana's leadership in maintaining vigilance even after the end of the global emergency phase.

**This should reassure all Ghanaians that, should there be any cases outside the university campus, our surveillance system remains active and ready to detect and respond effectively.**

## 2. The Current Situation

**As of today, 1st July, we have:**

- 316 suspected cases (people have shown symptoms and been tested)
- 107 of those cases have been confirmed as COVID-19
- There are no hospitalisations
- And importantly, no deaths

**Mr. Speaker, so far, the outbreak is limited to the University community. It has not spread widely to other parts of Accra or the rest of the country. As I mentioned earlier, all confirmed cases are recovering well.**

## 3. What Caused the Spike?

Mr. Speaker, after sending in a team to investigate, we found a few key issues that fuelled the spread. The most significant factor was the recent Hall Week celebrations held at the University. These events brought large crowds together, with little use of face masks or distancing.

Following our investigations even after the University Community became aware, we also noticed:

- A drop in adherence to basic COVID-19 safety protocols
- And some challenges with contact tracing

#### 4. How Government Has Responded

Once the first signals came in, we moved quickly. Here's what we did:

- Sent a national team to work with University and municipal health authorities
- Held meetings with the Director-General of the Ghana Health Service, heads of Noguchi, and the School of Public Health
- Issued alerts to all health facilities nationwide
- The University suspended all hall week activities
- Launched a campus-wide education campaign using posters, campus radio, and student leaders

## 5. What's Next?

We are not stopping there. Additional steps underway include:

- Supporting Legon Hospital and the Student Clinic with more resources
- Preparing the Ghana Infectious Disease Centre to handle severe cases—if any occur
- Holding face-to-face sessions with student bodies and faculty
- Providing more PPEs and training for frontline health workers
- Enhancing our data tracking in all health facilities, including mapping where cases are coming from
- And continuing to test and monitor daily

## 6. Public Assurance: What You Need to Know

**Mr. Speaker, I want to assure Ghanaians that this is not a new virus, and we are not back to 2020. This Omicron variant has been with us before. It spreads fast, yes - but it is mostly mild. And we know how to manage it.**

We've beaten back bigger waves before, and we can do it again—with calm, cooperation, and good public health practices.

## 7. Vaccination and Treatment Options

Mr. Speaker, I wish to clarify that **COVID-19 vaccination is no longer part of the country's routine immunisation program. Indeed, this is the case in most countries.** That said, vaccination remains one of the important tools that can be used to control the spread of COVID-19 infections and, more importantly, prevent severe disease and deaths. As a result, and in preparation for a potential surge, we have initiated the necessary processes to secure vaccines in-country. This is in line with our policy to protect the health of vulnerable populations - particularly people with underlying medical conditions and the aged, who are more likely to develop more severe disease.

**Additionally, I wish to assure the public that treatment is available for COVID-19.** Paxlovid (an antiviral that is taken twice a day for 5

days only) is recommended for patients with mild to moderate COVID-19 who have co-morbidities such as diabetes or hypertension. It has proven effective and has minimal side effects.

Generally, Mr. Speaker, treatment for those who get infected is based on symptoms. **Most people recover at home. For more serious cases, our hospitals are prepared and stocked to provide oxygen therapy and all the necessary care.**

#### 8. Other Viruses and Bacteria Going Around

**Mr. Speaker, let me also mention that we are seeing a rise in seasonal flu cases - as we do have during the rainy season.** These flu symptoms—fever, cough, sore throat—can look like COVID-19, so we urge anyone feeling unwell to go to a health centre early.

**Also, though the number of cholera cases are down, we are still reporting cases especially during this rainy season. Some of the risk**



**factors for cholera lie beyond the health sector, we urge all to wash their hands with soap under running water, eat food that is hot and drink potable water.**

Finally, Mr. Speaker as of 29th June, we had confirmed 133 cases of MPOX mostly in the Western, Greater Accra and Western North Regions. It is essential to note that **there are currently no admissions and we have had no deaths associated with the MPOX outbreak to date. Additionally, except for the cases confirmed in the past week, all affected individuals have fully recovered.**

Mr. Speaker, MPOX spreads through close contact, and we all need to stay safe, avoid close contact with anyone with symptoms suggestive of MPOX – which include fever, rash, headache and swollen lymph nodes – and protect ourselves by washing our hands regularly with soap and water.

## 9. What We Can All Do

Specific to COVID-19, here is what each of us can do to help stop the spread (I must add that most of these universal precautions apply to both flu and COVID-19):

- Wash hands regularly with soap and water
- Wear a mask in crowded or poorly ventilated places
- Stay home when feeling unwell
- Avoid gatherings if you're sick
- And go to the nearest clinic as soon as you notice symptoms

## 10. Logistics and Preparedness

The Ministry of Health has made sure that our response is well-resourced. PPEs, test kits, and treatment supplies are all in place. Health workers are being supported, and emergency centres like the Ghana Infectious Disease Centre are on standby.

## 11. Conclusion: No Cause for Panic

**Mr. Speaker, colleagues, this is a localised outbreak - and we are on top of it. There is no need for panic. However, we must remain vigilant and responsible.**

The Ministry of Health and its agencies remain committed to protecting the health of all Ghanaians - students, workers, families, and the vulnerable alike.

Let us each do our part to keep our communities safe.

Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 is not over—but neither is our resolve.

Thank you, and may God bless our homeland Ghana.