

SECRET

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**MEMORANDUM OF THE HONOURABLE COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH, RIVERS STATE ON
CONTAINING DISEASE OUTBREAKS IN CONGREGATE SETTINGS: A CASE TO STRENGTHEN
MEDICAL SERVICES AT YOUTH CORP CAMPS AND PRISONS.**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memorandum is to seek approval of Council to direct relevant agencies to reinforce early diagnosis and effective containment of infectious disease outbreaks in congregate settings in the country: A case for the strengthening of medical services at National Youth Service Corp camps and Nigeria Prisons.

INTRODUCTION

The recent outbreaks of infectious diseases across the country despite concerted effort at control and the associated morbidity and mortality has continued to be a source of worry. More troublesome has been cases of Viral Haemorrhagic disease and Monkey Pox Virus infections in the Southern part of the country. Studies suggest an estimated 300,000-500,000 Lassa infections/year whilst very few are actually detected. Following the first index case in Bayelsa, the country reports an estimated 205 cases of suspected Monkey Pox Virus with 80 cases confirmed across 24 States with three deaths as at 2nd February 2018. Within the same period, in Rivers State, following the identification of an index case in October, 2017, there has been about twenty seven laboratory confirmed cases of monkey pox.

Incidentally there were five cases of Monkey Pox infections in Port Harcourt Prisons and two cases of Monkey Pox infections in National Youth Service Corp camp in December, 2017 which were effectively contained. These cases posed very significant challenges to control in settings beyond the ordinary. Despite being congregate settings which could make transmissions easier, these settings have commonly observable poor medical capability for triage and early containment. They seemed significantly overcrowded and the standards of cohabitation made interruption of transmission herculean as toilets were shared and no preparation was made for isolation of cases considered as infectious. Areas for decontamination were open ended and the line listed contacts which required monitoring was significantly lengthy. The situation appears to be similar across same settings around the country. These challenges are also observable in temporary religious and social camps.

All congregate settings with residential status should have the capacity for identifying, triage and isolation before they are set up.

JUSTIFICATION

Preparedness is key to controlling infectious diseases of public health significance. Indeed, congregate settings of the Prisons and Youth Corp camps in the country are hot spots and high risk areas for transmission of infectious diseases with persons of diverse background travelling across peculiar localities with specific disease preferences only to converge in a single locality to share common social amenities.

Most of these facilities are overcrowded, poorly maintained with poor medical triage and response systems. Whilst the regular inmates and Corp members may be confined, it is important to note that the staff of these facilities return home to general public off-duty periods and can establish a transmission link with the general public whenever there is an outbreak in the setting.

PRAYERS:

Council is humbly requested to note:

- i.) Congregate settings should have a minimum of a medical clinic, with a trained medical officer who has capacity to identify and institute early containment measures in infectious diseases conditions.
- ii.) In addition, the medical centre in all camps and prison facilities should be sufficiently equipped for exit and entry triage processes for detecting infectious disease manifestations and must have a private or holding bay for keeping in case of scenarios were suspected cases are identified.
- iii.) The consequences of a poorly managed outbreak in a congregate setting and the attendant media resonance of an outbreak in these settings is not in the interest of the health care delivery system at this time when vigorous attempt at restoring confidence of the people in our health delivery systems is most desired.
- iv.) It is therefore imperative to ensure that minimum medical standards are met in the Corp camps and Nigeria Prisons which incidentally are all federal institutions.

Council is further invited to:

- I.) Approve that all congregate settings including the Corp camps, Religious camps, Social camps and Prisons, should consciously maintain the minimum standard necessary for Infection Prevention and Control, especially entry and exit triage systems as recommended in the National Policy.
- II.) Direct the relevant agencies in charge of Youth Corp camps and Prisons in the country to ensure that there is a fully functional clinic with a holding bay for identified cases of infectious diseases in order to guarantee the interruption of transmission of infectious diseases where necessary and safeguard lives of campers and inmates.

HONOURABLE COMMISSIONER FOR HEALTH RIVERS STATE
JUNE, 2018.