Ministry of Health says the country faces a significant shortage of emergency medical personnel, even as its ambulance fleet continues to expand, raising concerns about response times in critical situations.

On April 29, 2026, officials made the announcement at the conclusion of a 10-day training for 25 emergency responders, part of ongoing efforts to strengthen pre-hospital emergency care.

The ministry said Rwanda has about 500 ambulances nationwide, but requires at least 3,000 trained personnel to operate them effectively. Currently, fewer than 500 workers are available, even when counting staff in the capital, Kigali, and across hospitals.

“We assign five staff members to each ambulance because they work in shifts,” said Dr. Nkeshimana Menelas, head of department of health workforce development at the Ministry of Health. “But what we have is less than one-tenth of what is needed.”

The shortage has affected response times. While international standards recommend that emergency responders arrive within 10 minutes, Rwanda’s average response time is about 15 minutes.

Officials say traffic congestion has contributed to delays, though new measures — including the use of motorcycles for first responders — are helping improve rapid access to patients before ambulances arrive.

The government has begun scaling up training efforts in partnership with Rwanda Polytechnic. The 25 trainees, who are already working in the health sector, are expected to help train others as part of a broader capacity-building strategy.

Starting in September, a new two-year training program in pre-hospital emergency medical services is expected to enroll more students, modeled on similar programs in other countries.

The recent training, held at IPRC Kigali, was conducted with support from the Association of Ambulance Professionals Uganda. Participants demonstrated their skills through simulated emergency scenarios, including road traffic accidents.

“We strengthened our existing knowledge and learned international best practices,” said Turikumwe Jean d’Amour, an emergency services staff member at the Rwanda

Biomedical Centre. “The goal is to ensure patients receive care quickly and are transported to hospitals within the ‘golden hour.’”

Rwanda uses a range of emergency transport options, including ambulances, motorcycles, boats and helicopters, to respond to incidents involving one or multiple patients.

Despite ongoing efforts, officials acknowledge that closing the staffing gap remains a major challenge as the country works to meet international standards for emergency medical response.

Emergency services in Rwanda can be accessed through the toll-free number 912.