

Rwanda is preparing to launch clinical trials for vaccines and therapeutics to combat Marburg virus disease, according to State Minister Yvan Butera. This comes as the country faces its first-ever outbreak of the deadly viral hemorrhagic fever, which has claimed 11 lives so far.

The outbreak was confirmed in late September, with the Rwandan Ministry of Health reporting 36 cases to date. “We are about to begin vaccine and therapeutic clinical trials to protect high-risk groups,” Butera announced on X, though details about the specific drug to be tested were not provided.

Currently, the ministry is monitoring 410 individuals who have been in contact with infected persons. Five more individuals have tested negative but are awaiting further test results, Butera added.

In response to the outbreak, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced on Monday that it is deploying experts to assist Rwanda’s health authorities in controlling the spread of the virus. “CDC is sending subject matter experts to support the country’s investigation and response efforts,” the agency said. These experts will bring experience from previous responses to Marburg virus disease and similar outbreaks to assist with epidemiology, contact tracing, laboratory testing, and infection control at hospitals and border points.

Marburg virus, which belongs to the same family as the Ebola virus, causes symptoms ranging from severe headaches and muscle pain to vomiting and abdominal pain. Fatality rates can reach up to 88%, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Both Marburg and Ebola are transmitted similarly and have the potential to cause large, deadly outbreaks.

Neighboring Tanzania experienced Marburg cases earlier in 2023, and Uganda had an outbreak in 2017.