

Toxic and substandard alcoholic beverages have been linked to more than 500 hospital admissions and at least 50 deaths in the first six months of 2026, Health Minister Dr. Sabin Nsanzimana has revealed, as authorities intensify a nationwide crackdown on unsafe alcohol production.

Dr Nsanzimana made the remarks following a decision by the Rwanda Food and Drugs Authority (Rwanda FDA) on Sunday, August 2, 2026, to close eight alcohol manufacturing facilities, revoke their production licences and order the withdrawal of affected products from the market.

Speaking to Rwanda Broadcasting Agency (RBA) after the crackdown, the minister said the scale of illnesses and deaths associated with unsafe alcoholic beverages had reached a level the government considers a public health epidemic.

*“We consider it an epidemic based on the figures we have. Since the beginning of this year, hospitals across the country have received just over 500 people who came for treatment after consuming these alcoholic beverages,”* Nsanzimana said.

The minister said the cases were recorded between January and June 2026, with affected people seeking treatment in health facilities across the country.

He cited major incidents in Ngoma, where more than 100 people were affected in a single case, as well as cases reported in Nyagatare and parts of the Southern Province.

*“Those 500 are the people who reached hospitals, where we received and treated them. Some lost their lives. There were also people who died before reaching health facilities. We have so far counted around 50 deaths,”* he said.

Nsanzimana said the impact of the unsafe drinks has gone beyond fatalities, with around 100 people losing their eyesight permanently, while others have developed long-term brain disorders, liver disease and other serious health complications.

He said the problem has grown gradually with the spread of highly concentrated alcoholic beverages containing 40 to 50 percent alcohol, alongside drinks produced using unsafe methods.

*“We used to know traditional drinks such as urwagwa and ikigage. Then alcoholic drinks with 40 to 50 percent alcohol appeared — drinks that many citizens had never encountered before. Then some people started producing them using other*

*methods,” he said.*

The minister also raised concerns over manufacturers who allegedly add harmful substances to alcoholic products before distributing them to consumers.

*“Some people establish good factories with the aim of producing quality beverages, but later they mix different chemicals behind the scenes, package them and give them to people to drink. These are the things causing illnesses and deaths,” he said.*

Nsanzimana warned that the government must continue treating the issue with urgency.

*“This is an epidemic among others, and we must fight it as an epidemic. If we do not act now, we will pay the price tomorrow,” he said.*

The minister’s comments came after Rwanda FDA announced on August 2, 2026, that it had shut down eight alcohol manufacturing facilities following regulatory inspections and compliance assessments.

The affected companies are Ingufu Gin Ltd, NBG Ltd, SKY Drop Industries Ltd, Africana Buffalo Ltd, Nopa Company Ltd, Roots Investment Group Ltd, Rugali Agro-Processing Company and Zhonglu Industrial Liability Company Ltd.

Rwanda FDA said the decision was taken in the interest of public health and ordered the immediate withdrawal of all alcoholic beverages produced by the affected facilities.

The regulator published a list of 38 brands of vodka, gin and whiskey subject to recall and instructed manufacturers to immediately begin recalling the products from the market.

Manufacturers were required to request distributors to return remaining stock and submit recall reports within three working days.

Distributors and retailers were also ordered to stop selling the affected products immediately and return remaining quantities to suppliers, while consumers were urged to stop consuming products manufactured by the closed facilities.

The factory closures came one day after Rwanda FDA revoked all ethanol import

licences, another measure aimed at addressing public health concerns linked to unsafe alcohol production.

The regulator said enforcement activities would continue and warned that more facilities could face action as inspections continue.