

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
ON
ANTHRAX OUTBREAKS IN THE COUNTRY
BY
THE MINISTER OF LIVESTOCK AND FISHERIES (MR CHIKOTE), MP

Madam Speaker, I wish to thank you for according me this opportunity to render a ministerial statement aimed at updating this august House and the nation at large on the recent outbreak of anthrax in animals. This is in response to your directive that I issue a policy statement on anthrax outbreak arising from the matter of urgent public importance that was raised by hon. Member of Parliament for Katombola Constituency on Tuesday, 7th November, 2023. The hon. Member want to know the status and extent of the outbreak in his constituency as well as other parts of the country and also enquired on the measures being undertaken by the Government to control the disease.

Madam Speaker, through this ministerial statement, I wish to not only share the current status of the outbreak as pertaining to Katombola Constituency, but also inform this august House and the entire nation the current status of the disease across the country. This is important because the outbreak has caused some concerns among our people and as the responsible Government, it is our duty to move in and take appropriate action to save both the lives of our people who are also getting affected and that of their livestock.

Madam Speaker, because of the important nature of this subject, and acknowledging that it is affecting a lot of our people, it will be remiss of me to neglect to share sufficient background to this topic of disease control before venturing into discussing the current status in Katombola and the country at large. This will ensure that we are all on the same page and will not only help us to understand and appreciate what the Government is doing, but also enable us play our part in bringing this outbreak under control.

Madam Speaker, animal diseases, just like human diseases occur at various intervals within animal populations and their occurrence ranges from natural factors such as environmental conditions, the immune status of the animals and also their movement patterns. In response, my ministry has developed several disease control protocols to address disease outbreaks. These protocols are based on current scientific knowledge and are implemented by my

officers. It should however, be pointed out that the success in implementing these protocols relies heavily on cooperation of our farmers and other stakeholders to ultimately result in effective disease control.

Madam Speaker, as part of these disease control protocols, the government has classified diseases into two main categories namely:

- (a) diseases of national economic importance, where the Government is responsible for the control of these diseases; and
- (b) management diseases, where the farmer is responsible for prevention and control of the disease with support from the Government through extension services.

However, for zoonotic diseases, which are diseases that affect both animals and humans, the Government comes in when there is an outbreak to control these diseases so as to save human life and this is regardless of the categorisation of the disease.

Madam Speaker, anthrax falls in this class of zoonotic because in endemic areas or high-risk areas when there is no disease outbreak, it is the farmer's responsibility to ensure that the animals are vaccinated to avert loss of livestock. When there is an outbreak, as is the case currently, the Government moves in to avert escalation of the outbreak.

Madam Speaker, with that said, let me now address the question of the status of the disease outbreak in Katombola Constituency and the measures the Government has put in place to control the disease.

Madam Speaker, our investigations reveal that there is prevalence of the disease in Katombola Constituency and this is largely around Kazungula District. The disease first broke out in cattle in Sianamunyama Village of Bombwe Veterinary Camp on 16th September, 2023.

Madam Speaker, sixteen kraals were affected and this has resulted in a total of forty-eighty mortalities in cattle. Following this outbreak, my ministry moved in to implement disease control protocols meant to curb disease outbreaks. These protocols included the following:

- (a) blanket vaccinations: under this intervention, my ministry has targeted to vaccinate the entire 33,000 cattle population in Kazungula and on 2nd November, 2023, 33,000 doses of the vaccine were dispatched to the district. Out of this, a total of 28,039 cattle, representing 85 per cent coverage have been vaccinated;
- (b) decontamination of grave sites. This is done by incineration, burying and use of chemicals to reduce environmental contamination thereby reducing re-occurrence of new cases and preventing future outbreaks;
- (c) sensitisation and awareness creation among the communities to educate people on the dangers of handling and consuming meat from animals that dies on their own. This is being done through meetings in the communities and radio programs;
- (d) ban on all slaughters and movement of animals and animal products in and out of the affected districts including Kazungula District. This is still in force; and
- (e) heightened surveillance in all the affected areas to ensure early warning of the disease.

Madam Speaker, it is envisaged that the implementation of these interventions, coupled with support of all stakeholders in the district and the constituency will bear fruit and help to bring the disease under control. In this regard, it may please this honourable House to learn that in the last five days, we have not recorded any deaths in livestock in Kazungula District.

Madam Speaker, let me now give an update on the status of the outbreak in other parts of the country. Currently, confirmed cases of the disease have been recorded in three provinces and affecting eleven districts. The affected provinces are Southern, Western and Eastern provinces.

The status of the disease and the affected districts is as follows;

Southern Province

In addition to the outbreak in Kazungula District, which I have already adequately addressed, two other districts are affected in the Southern Province, these are Sinazongwe District and Kalomo Districts.

Sinazongwe District

Madam Speaker, the ministry received reports from Sinazongwe Districts about incidents of anthrax in hippos and later in humans sometime in July 2023.

In August 2023, mortalities in livestock were reported. Tissues samples from the dead animals were collected and submitted to the Central Veterinary Research Institute (CVRI) and Choma Laboratory. These samples tested positive for anthrax. To date, a total of 245 cattle have died of the disease in Sinazongwe District. Following the implementation of a comprehensive vaccination program and other disease control protocols, I am glad to report to this House that in the last four days, we have not recorded any deaths in livestock in Sinazongwe. This is against the backdrop of the fact that as at 6th November, 2023, 67,164 cattle out of a population of 69,506 representing 96 per cent had been vaccinated in Sinazongwe District.

Kalomo district

Madam Speaker, the disease was reported in Kanchele Veterinary Camp on 27th October 2023. Six cattle mortalities were recorded as at 5th November 2023. Comprehensive vaccinations have started and as at 7th November, 2023, 11,718 cattle had been vaccinated and the process is on-going. It will please this House to note that in the last three days, we have not recorded any deaths in the district.

Western Province–Nalolo District

Madam Speaker, an outbreak of anthrax has been reported with twelve mortalities in cattle. This is in two veterinary camps namely, Mouyo and Mwandi.

Mongu District

Madam Speaker, anthrax was reported with nine confirmed anthrax related deaths in cattle in Luandui Veterinary Camp.

Senanga District

Madam Speaker, twelve cases of anthrax in cattle have been reported in Nande, Sibukali, and Lukanda veterinary camps.

Sesheke District

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Madam Speaker, incidences have been reported in five cattle, one goat and two dogs and one hippo all in Sesheke Central Veterinary Camp.

A total of 10,000 doses of the vaccine have been dispatched to Sesheke to control the disease.

Sioma District

Madam Speaker, Sioma has reported anthrax deaths of nine cattle and one hippo in Sioma Central, Nangweshi, Sinjembela and Mulele veterinary camps.

Eastern Province—Lumezi District

Madam Speaker, the ministry received reports from Lumezi District of anthrax incidences in wildlife and humans. Nineteen hippos were reported dead along the Luangwa River. The human cases were linked to the consumption of meat from the hippo carcasses. There has, however not been any reports of livestock cases. This notwithstanding, an initial 15,000 doses of the vaccine have been sent to Lumezi to commence vaccination of livestock in the district

Madam Speaker in addition to these confirmed and verified cases that I have shared, my ministry has also received suspected cases of anthrax in Mumbwa, Mpika, Lavushimanda, Shiwang'andu, Kasempa and Zambezi districts that are being investigated and are yet to be verified as anthrax related cases, through laboratory tests.

Madam Speaker, arising from this country status, my ministry has, in addition to heightening the disease control protocols that I have earlier alluded to, decided to hold comprehensive

vaccinations in all the eleven affected districts. In addition, a total of twenty-three other districts are being classified as high-risk areas due to their proximity to the eleven affected districts or on account of these being endemic to anthrax. These additional districts will also receive heightened surveillance as well as vaccinations.

Madam Speaker, my ministry, in line with our disease control protocols, has increased the production of the anthrax vaccine to a maximum of 150,000 doses every seven days. It should, however, be noted that the current vaccine demand arising from this unprecedented anthrax outbreak remains higher than the production capacity of the CVRI. To bridge this gap, my Government is already exploring avenues for additional vaccines through imports to meet the demand.

In this light, allow me to take this opportunity to make a clarion call to the private sector to step up and partner with the Government in procuring vaccines as it provides a viable business opportunity for them.

Madam Speaker, as can be seen from our interventions, my ministry is doing everything possible and working with other stakeholders to ensure that this outbreak is brought under control across the entire country in the shortest possible time.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, the ministry will also continue to monitor and review the situation and give updates and guidance on the disease control measures.

Madam Speaker, as I conclude, may I take this opportunity to thank his Excellency, Mr Hakainde Hichilema, President of the Republic of Zambia for the support given to my ministry for the control of animal diseases. Further, I wish to extend my gratitude to all cooperating partners, stakeholders and farmers for their cooperation as we work together in controlling animal diseases in the country.

I thank you, Madam Speaker.