Abuja, 20 April 2015 - The Minister of State for Health, Mr. Fidelis Nwankwo has debunked the rumors of unidentified disease outbreak which is attributed to 19 deaths since 15th April 2015, out of 24 reported cases. He further provided insights on the causes of illness and sudden deaths in two communities of Irele, Local Government Area (LGA) in Ondo State of Nigeria.

On 15th April when the disease was first reported, health officials from the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH), government agencies (including the Nigeria Center for Disease Control) and experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) were deployed to Irele, LGA in south-western Nigeria to investigate rumors of the unidentified disease outbreak.

The Minister in his speech at a press briefing held at the conference hall of the FMOH in Abuja on Monday 20 April, also disclosed that as at the time of the briefing "no new cases have been reported in the past 100 hours and no related mortality in the last 72 hours. We therefore believe that the situation is under control".

He also stated that preliminary epidemiological and laboratory

investigations indicate that the disease is not attributed to any infectious disease.

According to the Minister, "epidemiological findings indicate a strong linkage of the outbreak with the consumption of local gin that might have been contaminated with methanol". He however added that laboratory investigation is ongoing.

Mr. Nwankwo requested the journalists to use their media outfits to create more awareness and encourage the public to remain calm but vigilant and continue to report any events of public health concern to the nearest health authorities.

Also speaking at the press briefing, the WHO Country Representative in Nigeria, Dr Rui Gama Vaz commended the Ondo state government for the rapid response and the immediate deployment of its epidemiological structure to investigate and mitigate the situation.

Dr Vaz assured the Minister and the public that "WHO will continue to provide technical support to the FMOH and related agencies, to strengthen surveillance at community level for early case identification; the associated risk factors and to create awareness to avert similar situations in future".

Available records showed that the reported cases were among males, between the ages of 20 and 75 years old. Equally, 71% had history of having consumed locally brewed gin and were farmers. Symptoms of the unidentified disease include sudden blurred vision, headache, and loss of consciousness followed by death, all occurring within 24 hours of onset.