Measles epidemic breaks out in Amuru

AMURU

By Arnest Tumwesige

Thirteen suspected cases of measles have been recorded in Elegu town council, Atiak sub-county, Amuru district.

The district health officer, Dr Patrick Olwedo Odong, said four of the cases that had been examined were South Sudan nationals living in one household in Elegu town council. The affected children are aged 14 years and below.

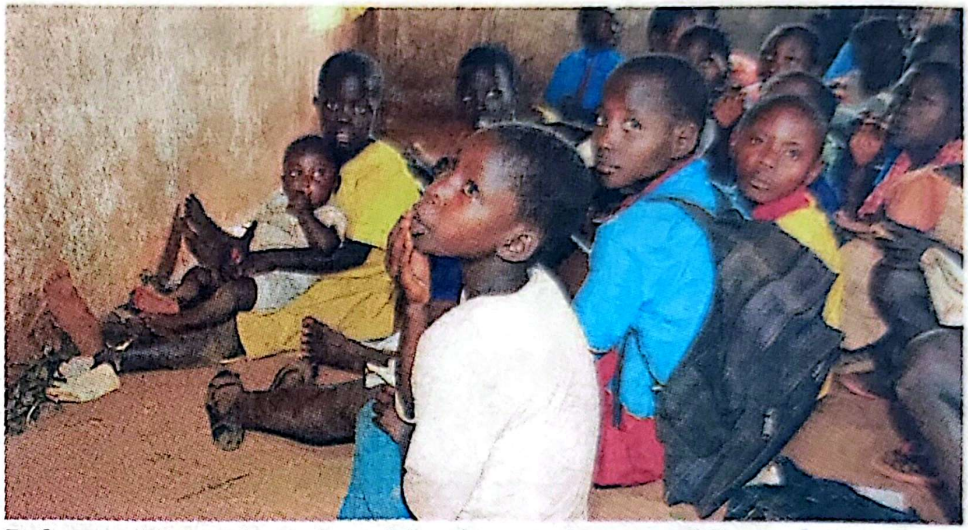
Dr Olwedo said since this was the first time to have such an outbreak, the disease must have spread from among the South Sudanese refugees who are fleeing the fighting in their country.

"By international standards, once there are five cases, it is taken as an epidemic. Our status already falls in that category," Dr Olwedo said.

By press time, Dr Olwedo was in Kampala to submit the status report to Dr Patrick Tusiime, the commissioner of national disease control in the health ministry.

He said vaccines had been dispatched to Bibia Health Centre III and Atiak Health Centre IV.

Dr Olwedo also urged community elders and leaders to identify suspected cases for monitoring.



Refugee children in a class. Measles can be spread through the air

Measles is a highly contagious virus that lives in the nose and throat mucus of an infected person. It can spread to others through coughing and sneezing. The measles virus can live for up to two hours in the air into which an infected person has coughed or sneezed.

OPM speaks out

Titus Jogo, the refugee desk officer in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Adjumani district, confirmed the disease outbreak. He said Medical Teams International had 20 suspected cases under close monitoring.

Jogo said the South Sudan suspected cases did not pass through their reception centre in Elegu. He said if refugees entering Uganda do not reach the centre, they cannot be examined or subjected to treatment.

Jogo also expressed fear that if some of the suspected cases cross into the resettlement camps in Adjumani, the situation may become severe if not contained immediately.

The office of the Adjumani District Health Officer and other agencies are in dialogue to find a strategy of curbing the disease.

The estimated average number of refugees entering Uganda from South Sudan through Elegu border point is 20 and 100 through Lamwo district on a daily basis.

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