WHAT IF YOU GOT A FAKE VACCINE?

BY CAROL KASUJJA

If you are not sure if the Hepatitis B vaccine you got is genuine, experts have warned that, you need to test before getting another jab.

At the beginning of this year, the National Drug Authority (NDA) carried out an investigation and intercepted counterfeit Hepatitis B vaccines from Serum Institute of India, in private facilities in the country. All the samples which were picked from Mbarara and Mbale showed inconsistencies, and were, therefore, declared fake.

On Wednesday, the parliamentary committee on health directed all private health facilities to suspend vaccination of Hepatitis B, pending investigations into fake vaccines on the market.

Later, the NDA spokesperson, Fredrick Ssekyana, issued a statement calling upon people who got the vaccine beginning at the of this year, to go back and be vaccinated again from Government facilities, or the private facilities which were cleared.

However, Dr Morris Muhindo, a senior laboratory attendant at Ssanyu Medical Centre, says people do not have to repeat the vaccine, because there is a way one can find out whether they received a genuine vaccine.



Some of the suspected fake Hepatitis B vaccines found at Mackie Lab Supplies Limited located on Twese Plaza, Kampala, during the NDA operations

"Hepatitis B vaccine is made from an organism called surface antigen. Before you receive the vaccine, we first test to see whether you have antigen in your body. If we find them, it means you have the disease. But, if we do not find them, it means you are negative. We give you a vaccine that has weak antigen to provoke your body to fight the disease. After the fight, you develop some kind of resistance. If you complete the Hepatitis B vaccine and we do an immunology test, we can be able to tell if the vaccine is present in the body or not," Muhindo said.

He advises people who have not yet completed the dose to buy a strip called Hepatitis B surface anti body (HBsAb). He says this strip will help them find out whether they got a genuine vaccine or not.

> If you took a vaccine you are not sure of, copy the batch number on the card and take it to NDA

He explained that: "The immunology test in private clinics goes for sh25,000, yet in public hospitals, it can be at sh10,000. And the strip goes for sh10,000 in pharmacies. If it shows two lines, it means you received the genuine vaccine, or you suffered from the disease and got healed. But if it shows one line, it means you did not receive the vaccine."

However, Dr Emmanuel Sseremba, a specialist in liver diseases at Mulago Hospital, says it is difficult for the people to find out whether they received fake or genuine vaccines.

"The number of people who received the vaccine is too big. I doubt whether all of them can go back to find out if the vaccine they received was genuine. It should be the work of NDA to tell the public that, those who received vaccines from this kind of batch number and manufacturer should go back for another vaccination.

"Otherwise, it is going to be difficult, because people react differently to drugs. We might do a test and not find the antibodies, when someone took the vaccine and yet, in others, we may find antibodies," Sseremba noted.

He also said people who have their vaccination cards should copy the batch number on them and take it to NDA, to find out whether that very batch number was tampered with.

"Usually, when people receive the vaccines, the cards indicate the batch number. They should take that information to NDA to be cleared," Sseremba noted.

Meanwhile, NDA appeals to all healthcare providers and the public to be vigilant and report any suspicious drugs, dealers and drug outlets. Dealers have also been urged to desist from purchasing drugs from unlicensed medicine suppliers.



APPRECIATION