

Death. Some hospitals say they have registered cases of death due to shortage of blood.

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KAMPALA. Pregnant women, children and those who need blood transfusion services face bleak futures as hospitals countrywide have run out of blood supplies.

Death of women at maternity wards have been reported in Kawempe and Arua hospitals, while Jinja hospital has had its patients who need blood, transferred to Mulago National Referral Hospital.

The situation is dire at Kawempe hospital which hosts the maternity and pediatric wards of Mulago Hospital. On average, between 60 to 80 women deliver in the hospital DAILY.

Dr Evelyn Nabunya, the director at the hospital, said: "We have had some unfortunate occurrences of deaths because of shortage of blood, in the hospital. I cannot tell you the numbers, but we need first to look into the records to cross check before confirming."

By press time, the exact numbers had not been confirmed.

Ms Nabunya said the hospital mostly deals with emergency cases.

"During operations, we need blood and when it is not available, the patient dies and that is the situation we are facing," she added.

Mr Fred Aniku, the head of laboratory operations at the hospital, said they are mostly hit with the shortage of blood groups O, A and B.

"As we talk we do not have group O which is given to patients in emergency situation. We also do not have groups A and B. We only have group AB because there are few people who are in that group. We have less than five units of the AB group," he said.

Arua Regional Referral Hospital has also reported some deaths.

Dr Emmanuel Odar, the officer-in-charge of the maternity ward, said the situation at Arua hospital could

Patients at risk as referral hospitals run out of blood



Shortage. Blood packs at the Uganda Blood Bank being screened before storage. A number of patients have died due to lack of blood in hospitals around the country.
PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

be worse than in any other hospital.

"Today [yesterday] we lost a woman at the maternity ward. She over bled and we had no blood to save her life," Dr Odar said.

At Mulago Hospital, the situation is not different. Mr Enoch Kusasira, the hospital spokesperson, said they have run out of most of the blood groups.

According to Mr Kusasira, the hospital on normal days operates on between 50 and 60 units of blood daily, but currently they are operating below 20 units.

"We have challenges but we are working," Mr Kusasira said.

According to Jinja hospital director, Dr Edward Nkrunsiza, they have in the last one week transferred four emergency cases to Mulago Hospital.

However, the situation is different in Mbale and Mbarara regional referral hospitals.

Dr Emmanuel Tugaineyo, the director of Mbale hospital, said the only shortage they have experienced is lack of blood group O.

"We have regional blood banks and we are not affected in the same manner. At least we have not lost any patient because of the blood shortage," he revealed.

2,000

Units. The units of blood that the country needs daily according to Uganda Blood Transfusion Services

Dr Celestine Barigye, the Mbarara hospital director, said: "We have no challenges with blood. The situation is normal and we are offering services as usual."

The Uganda Blood Transfusion Services has launched a drive to col-

lect at least 5,000 units of blood in one week.

Mr Michael Mukundane, the blood donor recruitment coordinator for the central region, said 2,000 units are undergoing screening at the centre in Nakasero. "Our target is to collect 5,000 by Saturday across the country," he said.

According to Mr Mukundane, the country needs up to 2,000 units of blood daily. Blood donated can last up to 35 days before it expires. This means that in 35 days, 70,000 units of blood have to be consumed.

Mr Mukundane said between November and mid-February, there is always shortage of blood because the biggest donors, the students, are on holiday. "We normally plan in advance, that's why there was no shortage in December," he said.

He has appealed to people between the ages of 15 to 65 who are healthy to join the drive to save lives.