

April 24-30 is World Immunisation Week. A part from saving lives, immunisation greatly reduces illness and death from vaccine-preventable diseases. Prisca Baike looks at the new vaccines to be introduced soon

# Govt to roll out new vaccines

After her four-month-old baby had suffered a severe influenza attack that left her with a fever, blocked nose and no appetite, Ritah Namisano, a resident of Kampala, was advised by a paediatrician to immunise her.

Like many others, Namisano did not know that beyond the known killer diseases, there are many vaccine-preventable diseases among both children and adults.

"I had never heard of an influenza vaccine. So, I was sceptical," says Namisano. "But after reading about it on the Internet, I decided to have my baby immunised."

She had to wait for two months since the vaccine can only be given to children who are above six months of age. For a fee of sh70,000, Namisano's baby got her preliminary flu shot from a private health facility. The next shot came a month later.

## One jab per year

Namisano said the doctor advised her that the flu shot would protect her daughter for a year. Thereafter, her child would have to get a jab once every year for her to be flu-immune.

A few months ago, she got her annual vaccination against flu. Up to today, her two-year-old daughter has not suffered from flu.

"Even when the children in my neighbourhood get flu, she does not get it," says the happy mother.

Dr Mary Nyangoma, a paediatrician, says the flu vaccine is good for both children and adults, especially those over 50 years of age, although many people prefer to only immunise children.

"More parents are immunising their children against flu and some other diseases that are not on the Government programme," Nyangoma says.

## Private market

She notes that apart from the known killer diseases, which are measles, diphtheria and whooping cough among others, whose vaccines are availed freely by the Government, there are some other vaccines available on the private market. These vaccines, she says, are not yet part of the national immunisation schedule, but the diseases the control are a potential threat, for instance, mumps and congenital rubella.



The Government plans to immunise children against more diseases beyond the common ones

## New vaccines

- Rota virus vaccine will be introduced in June
- Tetanus-Diphtheria (Td) vaccines will replace Tetanus Toxoid (TT)
- Measles and rubella (MR) vaccine to replace the measles-only vaccine this year
- Typhoid has been prioritised, but introduction time is unknown

"Vaccines are a cheaper way of eliminating illnesses and saving lives compared to treating them," Nyangoma says.

## Lives saved

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that active immunisation currently averts two to three million deaths every year. The Government has prioritised vaccines for 11 vaccine-preventable diseases, which pose a huge threat to the country. These diseases include measles, poliomyelitis, pneumococcal disease, hepatitis B, pertussis, tuberculosis, diphtheria, mumps,

tetanus, meningococcal disease and the human papilloma-virus.

David Katuntu, a senior programme officer at Vaccines at PATH, a global health organisation, says in terms of prioritising diseases for vaccination, the major challenge is about producing data on the burden of disease. This, he says, is usually a complex and expensive procedure which requires intensive study.

"If the disease burden is high, then it can be recommended for vaccination by the stakeholders. However, if it is still very low, it is put on hold," Katuntu adds.

Following its approval, a vaccine

## Immunisable diseases

### For free vaccines

1. Measles
2. Poliomyelitis
3. Pneumococcal disease
4. Hepatitis B
5. Pertussis
6. Tuberculosis
7. Diphtheria
8. Mumps
9. Tetanus
10. Meningococcal disease
11. Human papilloma-virus
12. Rotavirus gastroenteritis

### These come at a cost

13. Influenza (sh70,000)
14. Yellow fever (sh80,000)
15. Rubella
16. Malaria
17. Rabies
18. Cholera
19. Typhoid fever
20. Hepatitis A
21. Hepatitis E
22. Tick-borne encephalitis
23. Haemophilus influenzae type b
24. Varicella and herpes zoster (shingles)
25. Dengue fever

requires certain logistical aspects to be in place. These include the need for a cold chain, human resource and finances among others.

## Other vaccines developed

According to Dr Henry Luzze, the deputy programme Manager Uganda National Expanded programme for Immunization (UNEPI), Ebola, HIV and malaria vaccines are some of the highly anticipated vaccines that are still under development.

## Way to go

As the country seeks to lower its disease burden and eliminate preventable deaths, vaccines remain a fundamental yet efficient and cost