Schools ordered to stop hepatitis B vaccination

Covered. The Education ministry, basing on the advice of the Health ministry, says pupils under 15 years are already immunised against the virus.

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KAMPALA. The Ministry of Education has ordered primary schools head teachers in Kampala and neighbouring districts to stop the vaccination of primary school children against the hepatitis B virus.

In an August 18 letter, Education ministry permanent secretary Alex Kakooza said the hepatitis B shot is already contained in the DPT + Heb + HIP Pentavalent vaccine that is administered to infants in three doses at 6, 10 and 14 weeks.

"The children who completed this immunisation schedule are, therefore, fully protected. This cohort of children is up to 15 years now. The Ministry of Health has assured us that to date, there is no evidence that a booster dose is required since the early childhood doses offer life-long immunity," Mr Kakooza's letter addressed to district education officers (DEOs) and chief administrative officers (CAOs), reads in part.



Testing. A health worker takes a blood sample from a patient to test for Hepatitis B during a health camp in Kampala early this year. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

Fraud?

Some primary school head teachers in Kampala and neighbouring districts have been working with private for-profit health facilities and asking parents to pay for the vaccination of their children against the hepatitis B virus.

Mr Patrick Muyinda, the Education ministry's spokesperson, said it was wrong to charge parents for the vaccination, which is also risky to children's lives based on the advice from the Ministry of Health.

Mr Muyinda said the Health ministry advised that the hepatitis B antigen was introduced in the routine immunisation schedule of the Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation (Unepi) in June 2002.

"We have now advised all DEOs and CAOs to ensure this practice does not happen anymore in schools. They should warn all the school heads and ensure they get this directive," Mr Muyinda said.

However, the schools have been advised to liaise with district health officers and recognised public health facilities to arrange for other vaccinations that are recommended by Unepi and are available at no cost.

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