

# Medical laboratories exposing patients to infections - report

**On the spot.** The audit, which involved a total of 210 laboratories, put medical laboratory performance at 33 per cent far below the standard 50 per cent protection against biological substances which pose a threat to the health of living organisms.

BY LILIAN NAMAGEMBE  
lnamagembe@ug.nationmedia.com

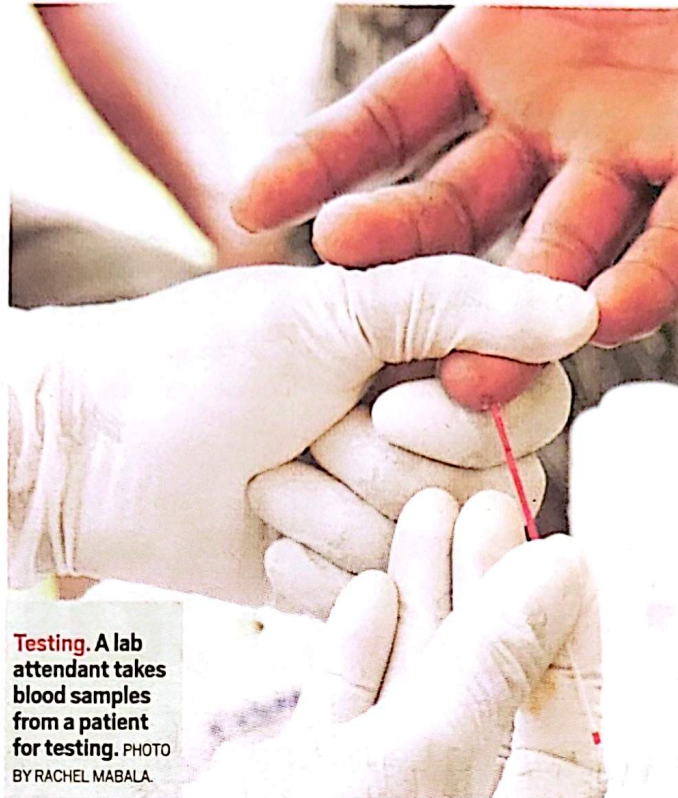
**KAMPALA.** Medical laboratories in the country are exposing health workers to terminal infectious agents from clinical specimens which they later transmit to patients and the community due to lack of protective gear, a report on biorisk management (BRM) has shown.

"In Uganda, the magnitude of the infections, injuries and contamination arising from health laboratories varies from mild to fatal and laboratory health workers continue to be victims to related accidents albeit limited documentation," the National Laboratory Biorisk Management audit report 2017, reads in part.

The audit, which involved a total of 210 laboratories, put medical laboratory performance at 33 per cent far below the standard 50 per cent protection against biological substances which pose a threat to the health of living organisms, primarily that of humans (Biorisk management).

Health laboratories are used to conduct tests usually done on clinical specimens in order to obtain information about the health of a patient as pertaining to the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease.

According to the report, such infections exposed to



**Testing.** A lab attendant takes blood samples from a patient for testing. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

laboratory users range from bone, blood, skin infections and pathogens that can cause fatal epidemics including cholera, ebola and Marburg, which can spread out of the laboratory to the public.

Focused on current status, compliance to standards, performance and competence of trained health personnel and subjecting them to a national standardised quantified based checklist, out of the 2010 laboratories, 180 were government owned while 30 per cent were privately owned.

Underperformance was realised in areas of management responsibilities, storage and sanitation facilities, waste management, occupational safety and health, chemical hazard, lab biosecurity, personal protective gears and

infectious materials.

"This audit reveals that all laboratories assessed are below average and therefore they could be at increased risk to laboratory hazards," the report notes further.

The Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health, Dr Diana Atwine, in response to the audit report findings said the ministry has planned to streamline

## FOCUS

**Lacking.** Underperformance was realised in areas of management responsibilities, storage and sanitation facilities, waste management, occupational safety and health, chemical hazard and lab biosecurity among others.

laboratory guidelines intended to strengthen the protection of all health workers from any materials that are hazardous.

"What we are doing is to make sure that at all levels, we protect the laboratory users, community, we dispose of materials that are hazardous and we make sure that we increase the awareness of the public so that they can also protect themselves," Dr Atwine said at the launch of the audit report yesterday.

The countrywide audit carried out by the Central Health Laboratories and the Ministry of Health, is a national laboratory risk management programme under the global health security agenda (GHSA) aimed at achieving a world safe and secure from infectious disease threat.

Dr Susan Ndidde Nabadda, the newly appointed executive director of Uganda National Health Laboratories (UNHL), said the government agency provides laboratory support for disease surveillance through investigation and confirmation of disease outbreaks. The agency is also mandated to strengthen laboratory systems in the country promised to use her tenure to fix the gaps highlighted in the report.

"Because of the threat on terrorism, the biosafety checklist which they have been using has been strengthened compared to what we had that is why you have now noted that the performance is low but it is going to help us to fix the gaps that the next time we do the audit, it will have improved," she explained.

The development comes days after Parliament passed the Biotechnology and Biosafety Bill 2017