

Reason. Health officials say they do not want to waste the drugs, which will expire in the next six months.

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KAMPALA. Government yesterday announced a plan to begin free mass hepatitis B vaccination for Kampala and the surrounding districts of Wakiso, Mukono and Mpigi to enhance immunity and protect the population against the virus.

Dr Charles Olaro, the director of Clinical Services in the Ministry of Health, said they want to utilise the unused vaccines to avert wastage because they are due to expire in six months.

"We are going to give information on the road map for hepatitis B vaccination next week. Through the National Medical Stores (NMS), we are still collecting the vaccines from the various districts. We want to give them out like we did for yellow fever," Dr Olaro told journalists in Kampala yesterday.

He did not say how many people will be targeted during the campaign.

Dr Jackson Amone, the commissioner for Clinical and Curative Services at the ministry, said the population in the 39 districts where the vaccines had been supplied were reluctant in taking the three required doses of Hepatitis B vaccination.

Government had launched the mass hepatitis B vaccination campaign in September 2015.

Low turn-out

"When we had just started the vaccination in these 39 districts, the demand for the hepatitis B vaccine was high but subsequently, people have not taken interest in completing the dose required for the body to build full immunity," Dr Amone said.

The free yellow fever campaign was also launched to absorb the unutilised vaccines about to expire.

"We shall ensure the vaccines are all utilised in the first dose but we shall ensure we purchase more vaccines to cover the second and third doses to all members of the population who will have benefited in the first dose," Dr Amone said.

He said NMS is organising vaccination cards to start the immunisation campaign.

Dr Bernard Opar, the manager of Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation (UNEPI), said the hepatitis B vaccination is given to adults aged 16 and above.

The ministry's Permanent Secre-

Why govt will give free hepatitis B vaccines



Vaccines. The State Minister for General duties, Ms Sarah Opendi, displays hepatitis B vaccines in Kampala last month.
FILE PHOTO

tary, Dr Diana Atwine, said Parliament has allocated Shs10 billion for continuation of the campaign.

"We started with 39 districts that had high prevalence in West Nile, Acholi, Lango, Karamoja sub-regions. We are currently in 10 districts of Busoga and we shall further it to other parts of Uganda once funds are

Shs10b

Budget. Amount of money Parliament has allocated for the continuation of the Hepatitis B vaccination campaign.

available," Dr Atwine said.

She urged the population to take

all the three doses.

Commenting on suspected counterfeit Hepatitis B vaccines found on the market, Dr Atwine said the tests revealed the vaccines were genuine and similar to those used in government hospitals but had altered labels which sparked fear among authorities and the public.

FIGURES

Disease Burden: The Ministry of Health says Uganda is highly vulnerable with a 10 per cent national prevalence of hepatitis B infection but varying across the country from 4 per cent prevalence in the southwest and 25 per cent in the northeast.

Globally, hepatitis B infection

causes significant global disease burden with two billion people exposed to the virus, more than 350 million of whom are chronic carriers. It is a cause of more than 600,000 deaths worldwide annually.

Transmission: Hepatitis B transmission occurs through blood and blood product

exposures. While sexual and needle stick exposures are common modes of transmission in the low endemic areas, transmission in high endemic regions tends to occur in early childhood either perinatally (during pregnancy or birth) or post-delivery through child-to-child horizontal methods.