

Over five million children to receive polio vaccine countrywide

By Martin Kitubi

A total of 5.7 million children below the age of five will receive Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) in the three-day house-to-house campaign by the Ministry of Health slated to start on September 9, in 75 districts.

Over sh7.4b has been dispatched to the respective districts by the Ministry of Health for operational and social mobilisation in the campaign.

This was revealed yesterday at a media orientation on polio coverage by the ministry at Lourdel Towers, Wandegaya in Kampala.

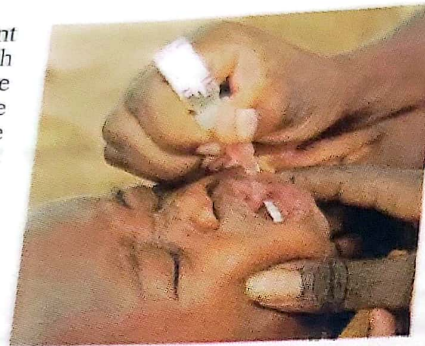
According to the ministry, majority of the districts are hosting refugees and others have low complacency by parents to take their children for immunisation.

Tabley Bakayita, the acting assistant commissioner in charge of health promotion and education at the ministry, told *New Vision* that the exercise will not replace the routine polio immunisation schedules offered to babies.

"The country is at risk of polio outbreak due to the refugee influx. This explains why we are conducting a house-to-house campaign and all should comply," he said.

The ministry has deployed 85 central supervisors to each district to co-ordinate the immunisation exercise with the health workers in the respective districts.

In the campaign, the ministry will also conduct checks for adults below the age of 15 years, with the aim to register zero polio cases in the country.



A child receiving a polio vaccine

New born babies are required to receive polio vaccines five times before they make one year. This will not be the first time the ministry has conducted a house-to-house campaign and

Bakayita urged parents to participate. Dr Henry Luzze, the deputy manager at Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation (UNEPI), said immunisation among children currently stands at between 95% and 98%. He is optimistic that the new campaign will push coverage to 100% with refugees inclusive.

In 2006, the World Health Organisation certified Uganda Polio free, but two imported cases were reported in 2010 in Bugiri and Amuru districts, due to movements across borders. Luzze warned private health facilities against charging Ugandans for polio immunisation, adding that there are public-private partnerships between the ministry and private health facilities that provide vaccines for free.

He said the vaccines will not harm children who are already receiving polio vaccines from their respective health centres adding.

Symptoms of polio

Luzze said although polio causes paralysis and death, majority of people infected with the virus become sick and they cannot tell if they were infected with polio, hence recommending immunisation for babies and visiting health facilities. Non-paralytic polio has several symptoms, including fever, fatigue, sore throat, vomiting, back and neck pain, meningitis, muscle weakness and pain in the arms and legs. Initial signs and symptoms of paralytic polio include headache, fever and loss of reflex, severe muscle weakness, loose legs and arms.