

Private hospitals stop children immunisation

Crisis. As a result of the suspension of immunisation in private hospitals, the last two months have seen mothers who routinely take their children for vaccination turned away. Similar cases have been reported in faith-based hospitals which are private but are not-for-profit facilities and are partly funded by government.

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At least 22 private hospitals and clinics across the country have suspended routine childhood immunisation against the main six diseases, leaving thousands of new born babies at risk. The hospitals have suspended immunisation of children against; Tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, whooping cough, Diphtheris, tetanus and measles.

Childhood immunisation is a cost-effective government policy to prevent children against death from the six killer diseases before their first birthday anniversary.

As a move to increase the coverage and accessibility of immunisation services in the country, government also extended the vaccines to privately own and faith-based health facilities to provide them to the public free of charge.

However, most health facilities have since been charging their clients user fees at between Shs1,000 and Shs30,000.

Two months ago, Ministry of Health (MoH) moved to stop the charges and wrote to the private hospitals through their association barring them from further charging the public any fees since the vaccines are supplied free of charge. The hospitals rejected the ministry's directive.

In response, majority of the 140 private hospitals under their Uganda National Association of Private Hospitals (UNAPH) suspended the immunisation services.

They argued they need the fees to finance support services such as procuring refrigerators to preserve



RESPONSES

No medicine.

"For us [Norvik] we have not suspended the immunisation services. It was only the polio vaccine that was in scarcity, but it has been a national problem," Mr Martin K. Abooki, Norvik's Corporate and Public Relations Manager.

Not true.

"Usually they inform me but the fact they did not, it means there were no stock-outs," Dr David Seruka, the Director of Health at Kampala Capital City Authority.

Prevention. A nurse administers a vaccine to a toddler at the Kiswa Health Centre IV recently. PHOTO BY RACHEL MABALA

the vaccines as well as paying staff involved in the immunisation and for other utilities like electricity.

Dr Dennis Kimalyo, the executive director of UNAPH confirmed the suspension of immunisation services. He said much as the vaccines are given free of charge, the hospitals incur costs during the immunisation and would want government to extend the primary health care (PHC) funds to private health facilities.

He said if government cannot contribute the money, it should allow the hospitals charge clients some minimal fees to cater for the attendant costs.

"On how much, [money for private hospitals], it should vary as there are health facilities that have a very high turn up," Dr Kimalyo said.

Dr Kimalyo said during the various meetings the association has held with the hospital owners, some of them who can afford the costs accepted to

continue the immunisation service free of charge, but others maintain the suspension.

"But even those who have agreed [to the ministry's directive] are complaining. Another issue is that in case of any implication resulting from the drugs, what happens or who would be responsible?" Dr Kimalyo asked.

He declined to name the private hospitals that have suspended their immunisation services.

The Commissioner for Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation (UNEPI) at the ministry, Dr Bernard Opar, accused the private health facilities of unscrupulous intentions to profit from the vaccines offered by government free of charge.

"Since it is in the interest of the public, they should be offering the services free of charge but for the fact they are being driven by profit," Dr Opar charged.