

Why you should immunise on schedule

By Andrew Masinde and Patricia Abaho

Teddy Nabwire, a resident of Luembaga in Bungo sub-county, Mbale district, gave birth to her first-born in 2001. The baby was healthy, but at four years, she became sick and weak. She took her to several hospitals and took a while before doctors diagnosed her child with polio.

"I became concerned when the doctor asked me if my child had been immunised. The truth is that I went twice to have the baby immunised. Doctors told me if my child had been immunised against polio, she would have been fine," Nabwire recalls.

"Today, the 16-year-old girl uses a wheelchair," Nabwire says. Rose Nangobi, a resident of Bunamame parish, Nabwaga sub-county in Kamuli district, also had a similar experience. The mother of two girls and one boy, says her eight-year-old first-born daughter was born normal, but fell ill at three years until she could not walk. After several hospital visits, it was discovered the girl had polio.

"I could not believe it because I had taken her for immunisation. However, when a nurse asked to look at her immunisation chart, she noticed that I had missed one of the shots against polio," Nangobi notes.

"This taught me a lesson and for the children that followed, I ensured that I followed the immunisation schedule and they are healthy," Nangobi says.

Nabwire and Nangobi are not alone. Many parents do not follow the immunisation chart, which has led to a number of childhood immunisable diseases.

During an interview with parents, many claim they delayed or avoided taking their children for immunisation because they cry whenever taken for the exercise. Some claim their babies are too young to take many vaccines. However, such parents are not aware of the risks they expose their children to.

Dr Henry Luzzze, the deputy manager of the Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation (UNEPI), says immunisation is the safest way to protect against a number of life-threatening diseases. Vaccines protect one by preparing one's immune system to recognise and fight diseases.

According to the United Nations

SIDE-EFFECTS

In rare cases, immunisation can cause seizures and allergic reactions. However, medical personnel emphasise that this may be because the child was suffering from other ailments at the time of immunisation. In cases, health officials advise that one lets the officer in charge of vaccination know that one's child is allergic to some foods, medications or if they have reacted to a vaccine before. Christine Nantume, a nurse, advises that one should not take a child for immunisation if he/she has a fever. One of the side-effects of some vaccines is, so the child may end up with a higher fever. Treat fevers that are a result of vaccination with paracetamol syrup as directed by the health worker.

Children's Fund (UNICEF) around the world, 87 million babies — nearly 20% — do not receive a complete set of commonly available vaccines and are vulnerable to diseases. As long as they are not immunised, an estimated 15 million children will die of preventable illnesses.

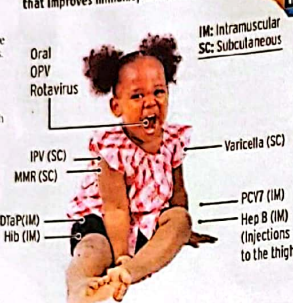
Before 2002, Ugandan children were vaccinated against six "killer" diseases. These include diphtheria, polio, tetanus, tuberculosis, measles and whooping cough. The Government then introduced the Hepatitis B and Hib (for H. Influenzae) vaccines, which brought the number to eight.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines immunisation as the process whereby a person is made immune or resistant to an infectious disease, by the administration of a vaccine. The diseases include polio, whooping cough/pertussis, diphtheria, tetanus, measles, measles (measles vaccine), neonatal tetanus, Hepatitis B infection, Influenzae infection, cancer of the cervix and



Vaccination sites

A vaccine is a biological preparation that improves immunity to a particular disease



Immunisation is the safest way to protect children from deadly diseases

pre-mucococcal infection. A vaccine is a biological preparation that improves immunity to a particular disease. The administered vaccine stimulates the body to make antibodies and can produce more antibodies when attacked by the disease against which the vaccine was given. Rose Mukodi, a midwife at Kamuli Hospital, advises parents to ensure that their children get the required vaccines.

"For the IPV vaccines to protect girls from cervical cancer is for those that are aged 9-13 years," she notes. Vaccines are effective when they get the necessary "boosted" doses," she says. Dr Flavia Katamba, a paediatrician at Princeton Children's Medical Centre, advises that parents complete the immunisation because prevention is better than cure. She notes that if not treated, these diseases can lead to permanent disabilities. According to UNICEF, however, in 2016, nearly 19.4 million children — 19.4 million children — were not fully vaccinated. Low immunisation rates are a global health problem, especially among children under five, by vaccination.

2002
The year when the number of killer diseases increased to eight from six

38b
The amount of money the Government spends on immunisation every year

1.5m
The number of children who will die of preventable diseases if not immunised

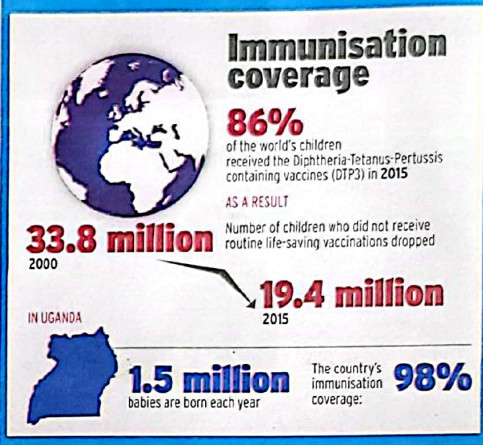
some clinics the vaccines are poorly stored, making them ineffective and may cause health complications. Kharono urges men to support women in ensuring that children get immunised.

Booster doses
"At 18 months a booster of polio, DPT, HepB, Hib, Hepatitis A, meningitis, polio, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, Hepatitis, Haemophilus influenzae type B are administered. At two years a meningococcal vaccine against meningitis is given. At five years against polio, DPT, Hib, Hib against polio, diphtheria tetanus, whooping cough, Hepatitis, Haemophilus influenzae type B are administered then at nine years and above for girls, an HPV vaccine is given," she advises. Christine Nantume, a nurse, says a booster dose is an extra administration of a vaccine after an earlier (primed) dose. She explains that a booster dose is a re-exposure to the immunising antigen. "It is intended to increase immunity against that antigen back to protective levels since memory against that antigen has declined over time. For example, tetanus shot boosters are recommended every 10 years," Nantume explains.

Other necessary vaccines
Katamba advises parents to go for a yellow fever jab. Yellow fever is a disease caused by a virus spread through mosquito bites. Symptoms take three to six days to manifest and include fever, chills, headache, backache and muscle aches. About 15% of people who contract it suffer bleeding, shock, organ failure and sometimes death.

Vaccination for pregnant women
Apart from children, Mukodi also advises women of child-bearing age (15-49 years), including those who are pregnant, to get the tetanus toxoid (TT) vaccines to protect them and their unborn babies against tetanus. Mukodi says those who do not get vaccinated are vulnerable to diseases that may complicate their pregnancy.

The bigger picture
WHO/UNICEF estimates national immunisation coverage of DTP3 at 86% in 2016, leaving 19.4 million children vulnerable to the preventable diseases. "With about 15 million babies born in Uganda every year, the country spends over sh5.2b on immunisation annually. The country achieved the 90% immunisation coverage target last year.



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Vaccines and the diseases they prevent

DTaP is a combo vaccine that protects against diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus. Tetanus is caused by bacterium clostridium tetani, which is found in soil, saliva, dust and manure. It enters through a wound or damage in the skin. The Hepatitis B vaccine guards against hepatitis B virus, which damages the liver. Rotavirus protects children against the most common cause of diarrhoea, vomiting and dehydration. Hib vaccine protects against Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), a bacteria that causes an infection in the brain and spinal cord that can cause brain and hearing impairment. Pneumococcal vaccine protects against streptococcus pneumoniae, which causes meningitis and pneumonia. Dr Flavia Katamba, a paediatrician at Princeton Children's Medical Centre Kampala, says polio is a crippling infectious disease caused by the polio virus. The virus can affect the brain and spinal cord, causing paralysis. She explains that at birth, a child is given BCG and oral polio to fight against polio and tuberculosis. "At six weeks, a child is immunised against pneumonia, polio, diphtheria,

tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis and haemophilus influenzae type B. At 10 weeks, the baby is protected against pneumonia, polio, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, hepatitis and haemophilus influenzae type B, she stresses. She adds that at 14 weeks, the baby receives pneumonia, polio, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, and hepatitis vaccines. Brenda Kharono, a medical officer at Makerere University Johns Hopkins Institute, says immunisation is done at different stages of growth because a child gets full immunity after going through the different stages.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

ENGAGING WITH YOUR UNBORN CHILD
Your unborn baby can hear and feel your presence. Therefore start playing and communicating with your unborn child while s/he is still in the womb.

How do you connect with your unborn baby?

- By frequently playing and talking with your unborn baby.
- By gently caressing and stroking your belly.

All these interactions are vital to the baby's mental development.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF STRESS DURING PREGNANCY?

- Stress during pregnancy can damage the development of the baby's brain.
- Stress experienced by a woman during pregnancy may affect her unborn baby as early as 17 weeks after conception.
- High levels of stress in a mother during pregnancy can affect the child's future behaviour.
- When exposed to early stress, the unborn child's brain function, learning and memory can be compromised.

Young children who experience extreme stress are, later in life, at greater risk of behavioural, emotional and cognitive problems. Maternal stress is associated with a range of negative child outcomes, including poor infant growth, children's emotional and behavioural difficulties, and insecure attachment with caregivers. Maternal stress may also lead to a negative relationship between the mother and the newborn infant.

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