

Govt declares measles outbreak in 26 districts

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ALEBTONG. The Ministry of Health has announced an outbreak of measles in 26 districts across the country. Health minister Jane Aceng named the most affected districts as Amuru in northern Uganda, and Kamuli, Mbale, and Butebo in the east of the country.

She said government, in collaboration with development partners, would carry out mass immunisation of all children under five years against the disease.

Measles is an acute and highly contagious viral disease that occurs primarily in children and is marked by runny nose, dry hacking cough, conjunctivitis, or swollen eyelids and inflamed eyes, watery eyes, and photophobia, or sensitivity to light. Other symptoms include sneezing, a reddish-brown rash, very small greyish-white spots with bluish-white centres in the mouth, insides of cheeks, and throat as well as generalised body aches.

The disease lasts three to four days and can be damaging to a foe-

tus during the first trimester, kills an estimated 2.6 million people yearly, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Dr Aceng, while addressing Alebtong District leaders at the council hall on Wednesday, said: "We already have 26 districts with measles outbreak, so DHO [district health officers] need to wake up and intensify routine vaccination for measles. The most affected group are children under five years."

Dr Aceng was in Alebtong to commission the district drugs store at a function also attended by Ms Rosemary Sseninde, the minister of State for Primary Education.

District leaders lauded

Dr Aceng lauded the district leaders for keeping the drugs store clean, but said Alebtong still had very low measles coverage.

"Mr Chairman, I want to bring to your attention that your polio coverage is very low. You need to pull up this polio coverage to 100 per cent, otherwise Uganda may pull the rest of the world down and we may fail to declare the world free of polio,"

TREATING MEASLES

Dr Vincent Karuhanga, a general practitioner at Friends Polyclinic, gives the following tips on how to treat a child with measles: Traditionally, it is treated using silver fish (Mukene) because it is nutritious and it is good since babies always develop wounds in their mouth and infections.

Being a viral disease, we treat symptoms such as cough using antibiotics, and skin wounds with antibiotic creams.

Provide warm drinks and cover the child properly to ensure they are warm.

Keep them hydrated to avoid secondary infections.

The child gets well in a about two weeks depending on their immunity.

Dr Aceng said.

She also said Alebtong has low coverage of pneumococcal vac-

cines.

"Your coverage for pneumococcal vaccines is low; just at 75 per cent and this is of a big concern to us because you still have children suffering from pneumonia, which is preventable, so we need you to pull this up to above 95 per cent," Dr Aceng said.

She said four health centre IIs will be upgraded to health centre IIIs and will include Angeta in Omoro sub-county, Awei in Awei sub-county, Akura in Akura sub-county, and Angany.

Dr Aceng also said government plans to secure another loan to construct health centre IIIs in sub-counties that don't have health centre IIIs.

But she said the residents' demand for government to upgrade Alebtong health centre IV to a district hospital status could not be met since the district has a low population of only about 250,000 people.

The district council chairman, Mr Johnson Okello, had requested that government upgrades Alebtong's only health centre IV to a district hospital.

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