

SUPPLIES ARE INSUFFICIENT TO MATCH THE DEMAND AND SOME BABIES END UP SHARING WHICH IS RISKY

Medics root for supplies to curb newborn deaths

By Vivian Agaba

Health workers have asked the Government to provide more medical supplies to attend to babies born with breathing difficulties, a step that will see a reduction in neonatal deaths.

According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) 2016, 27 out of every 1,000 live births die within the first month of their lives, a statistic that has not improved in recent years, despite an increase in the deliveries taking place at health facilities.

Some of the supplies the medics asked for include suckers, incubators, syringes and arm bags.

The medics revealed that the supplies are insufficient to match the overwhelming demand and, some babies end up sharing supplies such as baby nose suckers, which leads to the spread of infections.

Dr Moses Muwanga, the medical superintendent of Entebbe Hospital, said being a referral, the facility always receives cases of women with complications such as obstructed labour, especially those from the islands.

The hospital has only two suckers and three arm bags yet about 10 children born with breathing difficulties in one day may need to use suckers and a decision has to be made on which baby should benefit first.

"Suckers are used to draw mucus or any fluids out of the airways of a baby

"The hospital has only two suckers and three arm bags yet about ten children born with breathing difficulties in one day may need to use suckers."

in order for the baby to breathe well. If the mucus is not sucked out well, it will go into the baby's lungs and if not attended to immediately, the baby may die," Muwanga said.

He also revealed that neonatal deaths at the hospital dropped from 40% to 5%, thanks to the support from Save the Children.

Dr Paul Zirimala, a medical officer in Wakiso district, said research has showed that if health facilities had sufficient supplies, they would not need oxygen.



Brechtje chatting with Dr Martin Ssendyona, the principal medical officer in charge of quality assurance and inspection in the health ministry, at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala recently. Photo by Shamim Saad

"If a newborn baby fails to breathe, a health worker can use an arm bag to assist the baby to breathe. We need such supplies in our health facilities to be able to reduce neonatal deaths caused by among other factors, lack of sufficient supplies and trained human resource to handle such cases," Zirimala said.

He said fresh stillbirths are caused by pregnancy complications such as pre-eclampsia and birth complications and infections such as malaria and syphilis. Neonatal deaths are mainly a result of infections, including pneumonia, tetanus and diarrhoea.

"We encourage expectant mothers to go for antenatal care visits so that in case one has a problem, it is identified

early and dealt with," Zirimala said.

Zirimala was speaking during the dissemination of results from a health project known as Helping Babies Breathe Plus at Imperial Royale Hotel in Kampala last week.

The project which started in 2016 was implemented by Save the Children in partnership with the Ministry of Health and health workers from 32 health facilities in Kampala, Mukono and Wakiso districts.

The health workers, mainly midwives, were equipped with skills to provide comprehensive newborn care. Save the Children also provided equipment such as incubators and baby warmers to the facilities.

The country director of Save the

Children, Lith Brechtje, said through the project, the trained health workers acquired improved skills and competences to better manage the health of newborn babies.

She asked the health ministry to continue overseeing these achievements which would help to reduce the deaths of babies in future.

Dr Santa Engol, the maternal and newborn health project manager at Save the Children, said through the project, they have been able to reach out to over 170,000 mothers and children.

She added that in the selective health facilities where the project was being implemented, there has been a drastic reduction in neonatal deaths.