



People have been sensitised, they are willing to test and get immunised, but they are pulled back by the unscrupulous actions in many health facilities.

Although the Government insists they have the services, people have been disappointed going to health facilities and finding no such services.

Others turn to private practitioners, but the fees are asked to part with for the three doses pushes them away. The fees range between sh25,000 in private clinics to as high as sh40,000 per dose, for more.

We talked to different stakeholders involved in the fight against Hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B vaccine

Dr. Betty Apica, a physician from St. Catherine Hospital in Kampala, describes a Hepatitis B vaccine as "a protein derived from the surface coating of the Hepatitis B virus. This does not contain viruses, and, therefore, does not cause infection. After receiving the vaccine, the body produces antibodies to this protein."

She adds that these antibodies protect against Hepatitis B virus infection if a person gets exposed to the virus afterwards.

In a similar description, Dr. Diana Atwine, the permanent secretary at the health ministry, confirms: "These doses sensitise the body to manufacture anti-bodies (the patrol teams in the body produced by body soldiers), which fight the disease in case it shows up."

Who gets immunised

The Government has been calling both the young and the old to go for testing and begin on vaccination as soon as one gets negative for Hepatitis B Virus.

Dosage

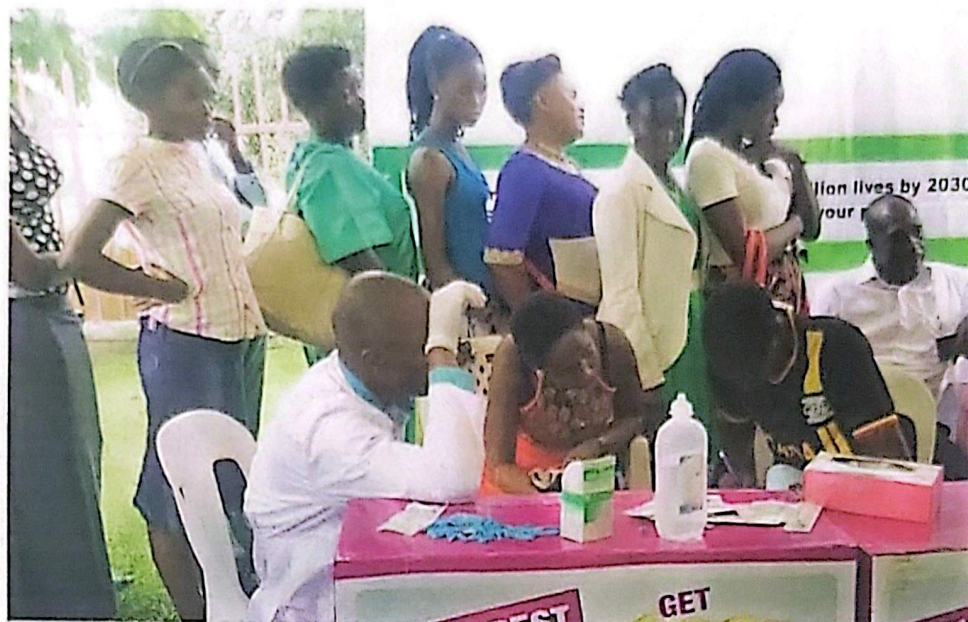
For babies, Apica says there are three doses for both adults and infants. "In babies, the vaccine is given at six, 10 and 14 weeks after birth as part of the shot in the thigh." She explains that the three doses for the babies contain five vaccines for Diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, Hepatitis B and haemophilus B. This vaccine was introduced in Uganda in 2002 by the Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation. "Any child born from 2002 onwards received it for as long as they completed immunisation," confirms Apica.

Just like in children, Atwine adds that adults get three shots in intervals.

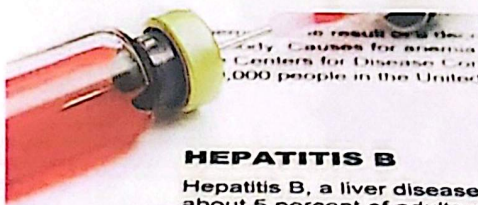
"Once one tests and finds they are negative of the Hepatitis B virus, they should immediately get immunised. The second dose is given after four weeks from the

There have been many unanswered questions surrounding Hepatitis B vaccines (HBV), and the general public is caught between crossroads, writes Fatumah Nahwanga

Hepatitis B Vaccine: The dilemma of getting a jab



Hepatitis B testing is ongoing in 39 districts. However, some people say they are disappointed by the level of services in public health facilities. As a result, private clinics are said to be charging exorbitantly for the vaccines



HEPATITIS B

Hepatitis B, a liver disease about 5 percent of adults

time someone received the first dose, and the third dose follows after six months".

Why the three doses

According to experts the three doses complement each other. The last dose strengthens the first two.

Availability of the vaccine

The sensitisation about testing and immunisation seems to be taking serious root in the communities, but the question is, where are the vaccines?

Ministry of Health confirmed to the public how vaccination in government facilities was underway and free of charge, but when people reach main hospitals at regional and referral level, they are told there is no Hepatitis B vaccine.

Atwine equally calls upon the public to report whoever asks for money from a patient to get tested or immunised in government hospitals because

it is illegal.

National Medical Stores

Just like with other diseases, the National Medical Stores (NMS) in Entebbe is partnering with the Ministry of Health to deliver Hepatitis B services to the people.

Moses Kamabare, the general

manager at NMS, however, says they have not yet began thinking about rolling out the second phase of the immunisation in other districts, because they have not yet even procured the third dose for the first 39 pioneer districts because they do not have the funds.

Fake or expired vaccine

Apica, advises the general public to always check the expiry date of the vaccine and also find out that it does not have solid particles. She advises that the vaccine should be administered with clean and safe needles, to avoid contamination. Apica adds that vaccines should be maintained in a cold chain during storage

and transportation, to prevent degradation.

Side effects of the vaccine

This is not to scare away would-be users of the vaccine, but, just like any other drug or even food, Apica confirms that vaccines occasionally cause reactions, such as fever, skin rash, cough and wheezing, among others.

"Very rarely do vaccines cause serious reactions. Any person who develops allergic reactions after the first shot of HBV vaccine should not receive subsequent doses," warns Apica.

She adds that during prelicensing trials of vaccines, the dose schedule with the best response and least side effects is chosen.

Ministry of Health position

We rolled out immunisation in only 39 districts as pioneer districts and we are planning to roll it out to the rest of the country soon. We selected the 39 districts from Northern Uganda and West Nile because they were found to have a high prevalence rate and needed urgent help. The second phase might, however, delay because, currently, the people from the first districts we selected are not co-operative. They are not turning up for testing and immunisation, like we had projected.



Dr. Diana Atwine, the permanent secretary for the health ministry

VIEWS

We have faint details



Hamidah Nalubega, Mityana
I heard about it in rumours, but I never bothered asking what it was all about. I don't know anything about testing or even immunisation against it.



Connie Muheli, Bukoto, Kampala
I have received all my three doses in order to protect my children and husband from contracting Hepatitis B, in case I contracted it.



Jamal Bbale, Kansanga, Kampala
I have heard about this disease, but I don't know much about it. I'm just planning to test and get immunised in case I don't have the virus.



Christine Ahimbisibwe, Bukoto, Kampala
I have not only tested and immunised myself, but equally tested all people who come to live in my house, to be sure they have no infection.