

Rubella virus accounts for 40% of visual and hearing impairment

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KAMPALA. Preliminary results of an ongoing study on multi-sensory impairment in Entebbe and Wakiso have indicated that rubella virus is responsible for about 40 per cent of the visual and hearing defects among babies aged 0 to 3 years in the country.

While presenting the results in Entebbe on Tuesday, Dr Barnabas Bakamutumaho of the Expanded Programme on Immunisation, said out of the 1,934 children screened under the early intervention programme, about 200 cases had hearing and visual impairment.

Dr Bakamutumaho said the rubella virus passed on from the mother to the baby during pregnancy was responsible for the disabilities.

Rubella virus is the pathogenic agent of the disease rubella, and is the cause of

congenital rubella syndrome when infection occurs during the first weeks of pregnancy.

Dr Bakamutumaho said between 2014 and August 2016, about 25 infants suspected of Congenital Rubella Syndrome were also identified.

The survey also showed that children who were diagnosed with the rubella virus, also suffered congenital heart disease and macrocephaly (large head).

Symptoms

Dr Bakamutumaho added that the blood samples for those suspected to have rubella are taken to the Uganda Virus Research Institute for confirmatory tests.

Dr Moses Muwanga, the medical superintendent of Entebbe General Hospital, said Congenital Rubella Syndrome has symptoms similar to those of measles and can cause pregnancy-related complications resulting in miscar-

riages at times.

He said with assistance from Sense International, a three-year early intervention programme, was launched last year through a partnership with the Ministry of Health to extend corrective treatment.

The virus can only be controlled through vaccination, according to Dr Bakamutumaho, but Uganda has not yet included the vaccine in the routine immunisation package offered at public health facilities.

The vaccine works by stimulating our immune system to produce antibodies against the rubella virus.

Ms Josephine Akiru, the country representative of Sense International, urged government to rollout a vaccination programme. She said the screening clinics in Entebbe, Wakiso, Ndejje and Kasanganti will be used to develop a model which will be implemented countrywide.