

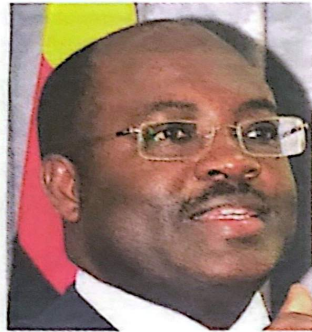
Meningitis immunisation campaign to cover 39 districts

The Government is set to conduct a mass meningitis immunisation campaign in 39 high-risk districts across the country, starting January 19, and ending on January 24.

According to Prof. Anthony Mbonye, the acting director general of health services at the health ministry, this is part of the strategies for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal 3, which is to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages".

The districts where the immunisation will take place include Abim, Adjumani, Agago, Alebtong, Amolatar, Amudat, Amuria, Amuru, Apac, Arua, Buliisa, Dokolo, Gulu, Hoima, Kaabong, Kaberamaido, Katakwi and Kiryandongo.

Others are Kitgum, Koboko, Kole, Kotido, Lamwo, Lira,



Mbonye

Maracha, Masindi, Moroto, Moyo, Nakapiripirit, Napak, Nebbi, Nwoya, Omoro, Otuke, Oyam, Pader, Soroti, Yumbe and Zombo.

The focus is on greater northern Uganda and parts of western Uganda because they lie in the meningitis belt of Sub-Saharan Africa, which

has experienced frequent outbreaks of meningococcal meningitis epidemics leading to high deaths.

"The dusty winds and cold nights which characterise the period between December and June in the meningitis belt increase the risk of meningitis," Mbonye said, adding that transmission of the disease is further facilitated by overcrowding and large population displacements.

Meningococcal meningitis is a bacterial form of meningitis that affects the thin layer of membrane covering the brain and spinal cord and can cause brain damage and death in 50% of cases if not treated.

The vulnerable

Mbonye, whose remarks were contained in a press statement said whereas anyone is prone to meningitis, it mostly

affects infants and children. The bacteria are spread from person to person during close or lengthy contact, especially among people living in the same households.

The meningitis campaign objectives include immunising the population in the age group 1-29 years and strengthening surveillance to achieve at least 80% coverage for the vaccination in the listed districts.

On December 20, 2016, 16 people were confirmed to be infected with meningitis in Kinyogoga sub-county in Nakaseke district.

Yesterday, the health ministry said there are no new cases reported in the district since the onset of the outbreak. Mbonye told *New Vision* in a phone interview that the outbreak had a combination of diseases including acute bacterial

- Fever and chills
- Mental status changes
- Nausea and vomiting
- Rash, pinpoint red spots
- Sensitivity to light
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck

SYMPTOMS OF MENINGITIS

meningitis, pneumonia and an eye infection commonly known as conjunctivitis.

"For the last three weeks we have not recorded any new case; we have treated all the victims. Before the outbreak was reported to us three people had passed on," Mbonye added.

According to the health ministry spokesperson Vivian Serwanjja, Meningitis breaks

out every three to five years in the dry and windy season between November and May.

Dr Quinto Okello the district health officer (DHO) Amolatar, said although cases of meningitis were last reported in the district before it was carved out of Lira, they have not stopped sensitising the masses regarding its dangers.

"People here are receptive to all government programmes. They are currently engaged in the Hepatitis B vaccination and malaria campaigns. The meningitis campaign therefore will not be a problem," Okello said.

Dr Joseph Ruyonga, the DHO Hoima, said the last outbreak of meningitis in the district was in 2008 with few deaths.

Compiled by Cecilia Okoth, Gerald Tenywa and Violet Nabatanzi