

# World Contraception Day

# Should teens get contraceptives?

**Justification.** The Uganda Health Demographic and Health Survey 2016 indicates a rise in teenage pregnancies.

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Seated on a bench at one of the health facilities in Makindye Division in Kampala, Florence Kizza, 14, breast feeds her baby boy.

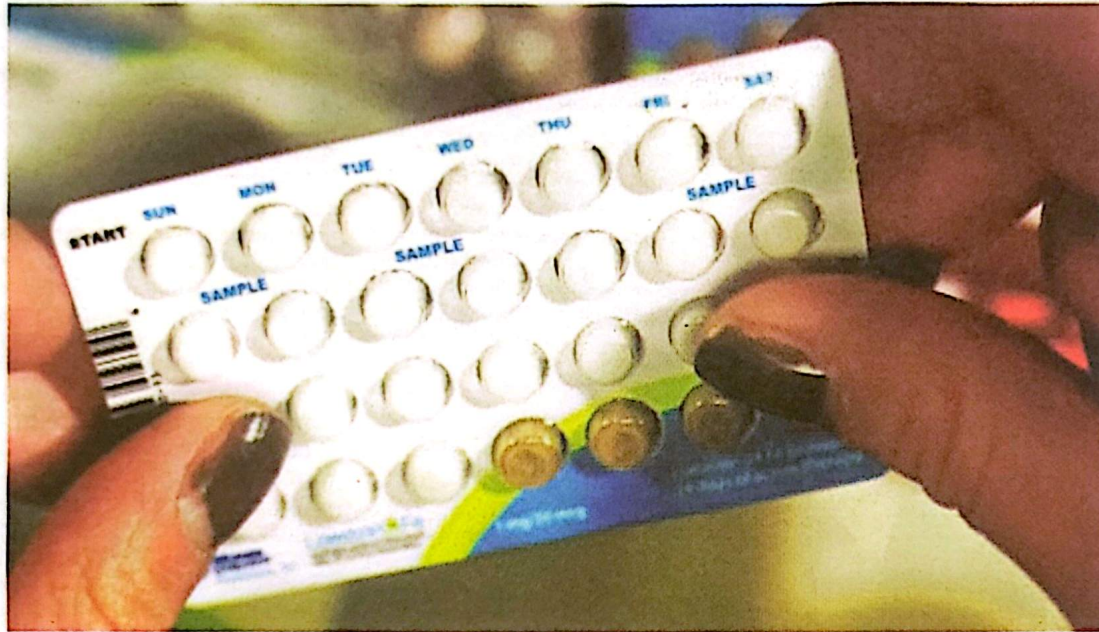
In a chat with this reporter, Kizza narrates that she conceived during her Primary Seven vacation after a sexual relationship with her Senior Two boyfriend, who lived a few meters from her home.

She admits said she did not expect to conceive because it was her first time to have sex.

Kizza's story is a microcosmic projection of many other teenagers in the country facing many unwanted pregnancies. The Uganda Health Demographic and Health Survey 2016 indicates a rise in teenage pregnancies from 24 per cent in 2011 to 25 per cent in 2016.

The study attributed the rise in teenage pregnancies to low education attainment among girls aged 15 to 19, with 34 per cent of them having no education and only 28 per cent with primary education.

The director general of Health



A woman displays contraceptive pills, one of the birth control methods. COURTESY PHOTO

Services in the Ministry of Health, Prof Anthony Mbonye, says it is time teenagers accessed contraceptives.

"Our country has the highest records of teenage pregnancy at 25 per cent. That means the girls are sexually active and we need to accept and let them have access to contraceptives," Prof Mbonye says.

In the new draft sexual and reproductive health guidelines to be released today, the Ministry of Health has amended the age to use contraceptives for sexually active Ugandans to 15 years and above.

"Initially, we encouraged children to abstain from sex. But teenage pregnancies are on rise, girls are getting HIV and parents should ac-

cept they have failed," he adds.

State minister for Health Sarah Opendi emphasises the need to promote the use of contraceptives among teenagers. She also accuses religious leaders and parents of discouraging the use of contraceptives yet adolescents are sexually active.

Statistics released early this year by Uganda AIDS Commission, in-

dicated that 500 girls get HIV every week. This means every year over 24000 girls get HIV visa-a-viz the number of teenage boys whose figures are unknown.

Dr Blandinah Nakiganda, the assistant commissioner for Health Services, observes that boys and girls who drop out of school are left idle, only to have children. She adds that family planning is a preventive method for controlling maternal mortality and teenage pregnancies.

Siraje Kifampa, the Nakasero Mosque spokesperson, says essentially teenagers should not have access to contraceptives as it appears to be promoting immorality but takes note of the changing society where teenagers are exposed to all sorts of information, which has exposed them to sexual activities.

"It is no longer news that teenagers know things which parents do not know. The dynamics have left children do whatever they want. This is a reason why immoral activities such as early sex are common amongst teenagers and therefore they should be let access contraceptives," Kifampa says.

Early this year, a policy had been drafted in which the Ministry of Health suggested contraceptives for adolescents and children aged 10 to 19 years.