

By Prossy Nandudu

The Ministry of Health is to strengthen its surveillance and monitoring of Kampala and Wakiso districts during a measles outbreak in the two districts.

The director general of health services, Dr Anthony Mbonye, explained that the surveillance team from the health ministry has confirmed 67 cases of measles through laboratory tests conducted last month.

Mbonye attributed the outbreak to failure by parents to take children for immunisation against measles at the recommended schedule of six and nine months, making them more vulnerable to the disease.

Most immunisation

Measles breaks out in Wakiso, Kampala

campaigns that could have prevented the outbreak of the disease, have been fought by some religious cults and beliefs that when immunised, children could die.

"The disease manifested itself last month, with seven testing positive. However, we are containing the situation, in addition to sensitising the public about the importance of immunisation," Mbonye said.

He, however, added that they will only go for mass immunisation once more cases are reported.

The director of health services at Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) Dr

KEY FACTS ABOUT MEASLES

- Measles is one of the leading causes of death among young children, even though a safe and cost-effective vaccine is available
- In 2015, there were 134,200 measles deaths globally, accounting for about 367 deaths every day or 15 deaths every hour.
- Measles vaccination resulted in a 79% drop in deaths due to measles between 2000 and 2015 worldwide.
- In 2016, about 85% of the world's children received one dose of measles vaccine by their first birthday through routine health services – up from 73% in 2000.
- During 2000-2015, vaccination prevented an estimated 20.3 million deaths, making the measles vaccine one of the best buys in public health.

Daniel Okello explained that some of the 67 cases confirmed by the ministry

were from Mulago Hospital.

To supplement the ministry's efforts, Okello said they would

consider rallying the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF to plan for mass immunisation campaigns to contain the disease, before it spreads, since it is airborne.

"An immunised child has about 85% immunity, but those who are not immunised lack immunity and are easily attacked by diseases. That is the kind of sensitisation we want to spread with the help of some development partners so as to contain the disease," Okello said.

What is measles?

According to WHO, measles is a highly contagious viral disease, which affects mostly

children. It is transmitted via droplets from the nose, mouth or throat of infected persons. Initial symptoms, which usually appear 10-12 days after infection, include high fever, runny nose, bloodshot eyes, and tiny white spots on the inside of the mouth. Several days later, a rash develops, starting on the face and upper neck and gradually spreading downwards.

There is no specific treatment for measles, and most people recover within 2-3 weeks. However, particularly in malnourished children and people with reduced immunity, measles can cause serious complications, including blindness, encephalitis, severe diarrhoea, ear infection and pneumonia. Measles can be prevented by immunisation.