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Govt warns of more diseases as Ugandans intensify kaveera use

BY PAUL TAJUBA

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KAMPALA. Three government bodies have separately warned Ugandans against eating food boiled in polythene bags, popularly known as *kaveera*, saying the continued use of the banned product only accelerates one's journey to the grave.

The Ministry of Health, Uganda Cancer Institute and the National Environment Management Authority (Nema), issued the warning separately in interviews with this newspaper yesterday.

Polythene bags and other plastics contain plasticizers that leach into food, thus causing non-communicable diseases, said Dr Gerald Mutungi, the commissioner for non-communicable diseases.

"Polythene contains pathogens which cause cancer. Once you heat

polythene, these chemicals are released into the food," Dr Mutungi said.

It is common to walk to a fast food stall on the roadside and your hot chapatti or chips are packed in a polythene bag.

This, together with boiling water and letting it cool in plastics, households and restaurants replacing banana leaves with *kaveera* to cover their food boiling on stoves, should immediately be abandoned, experts say.

"Particles in polythene when heated can get into food and then your body system. This exposes you to various non-communicable diseases. It is not a safe practice," Dr Jackson Oryem, the Uganda Cancer Institute director, said.

Some of the non-communicable diseases, according to World Health Organisation, include asthma, can-

cer, chronic kidney, chronic lung, diabetes and heart disease.

A 2014 national non-communicable disease risk factor survey indicated that one in every four adults in Uganda suffers from a non-communicable disease. There has been an upsurge of cancer, one of the deadliest diseases in the country, with statistics indicating that more than 2,800 new cancer cases were regis-

tered in 2012 up from 1,800 in 2011.

Mr Bob Nuwagira, the Nema communications officer, said the ban on *kaveera* is still on and asked Ugandans "to exercise self-regulation to safeguard themselves".

The *kaveera* use, manufacture and import ban however suffered a stillbirth as government agencies, especially the Trade Ministry together with the manufacturers fought it.

DISEASES

According to the WHO, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) kill 40 million people each year.

Each year, 15 million people between the ages of 30 and 69 years die from a NCD. Cardiovascular diseases account for 17.7 million people annually, followed by cancers (8.8 million), respiratory diseases (3.9 million), and diabetes (1.6 million), according to WHO.

