

Cervical cancer vaccines expire – Mutungi

By Vivian Agaba

The Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccines across the country are expiring as a result of low uptake by the targeted girls aged 10 years and above.

This was revealed by the programme manager, non-communicable diseases (NCD), Ministry of Health, Dr Gerald Mutungi, during a stakeholders meeting at Eureka Place Hotel in Ntinda, Kampala, yesterday.

The HPV vaccination is crucial in preventing different types of cancers, with the most common being cervical cancer.

In Uganda, the vaccination is available at all public health facilities and not-for-profit organisations. It is given in two doses with a six-month gap.

Speaking at the meeting, Mutungi was concerned that the vaccines are expiring, yet they are expensive, although he did not divulge the details regarding how much the Government spends procuring them.

“Young girls are not being vaccinated and this will make it hard to fight against cervical cancer in the country,” he said.

“There is lack of information about the existence of the vaccination. Some think the vaccination is another form of family planning given to their girls indirectly,” he said.

Mutungi said to increase the uptake, there was need to continuously sensitise the

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ Mutungi said the vaccines were expiring, yet they were expensive, although he did not disclose the details regarding how much the Government spends procuring them.

public about the importance of vaccinating young girls and screening women.

Dr Immaculate Ampeire, who works with the Uganda National Expanded Programme for Immunisation (UNEPI) at the Ministry of Health said it is mainly the second dose that most girls miss.

She said after a nationwide programme of HPV vaccination was rolled out in 2015, a new vaccine post-introduction evaluation (PIE) was carried out in October 2017 and revealed the consumption of dose-two is not good.

For instance, by end of 2017, the HPV1 (first dose) coverage was 88% while HPV2 (second dose) coverage was at 41%, indicating a drop-out rate of 42%, according to clinical records at government facilities.

Ampeire blamed the drop in coverage on the laxity between health facilities and schools, since this vaccination programme is mainly carried out in schools targeting adolescent girls who have not yet had

sexual intercourse.

“Schools are supposed to liaise with health facilities, for health workers to go there and vaccinate the girls, but this is lacking and explains the reason for the drop. If a girl does not get the second dose, it means they are not fully protected from the HPV and one can easily get infected. We need to bring parents on board, but also ensure co-ordination between schools and health facilities is strengthened,” she advised.

Dr Noleb Mugisha, the head of comprehensive community cancer programme at Uganda Cancer Institute, said cervical cancer was the leading type of cancer among women in the country. He said it is estimated that 50 of every 100,000 women in Uganda had cervical cancer and more than 80% of women diagnosed with the disease would present with advanced signs and symptoms, making chances of survival minimal.

“Cervical cancer is caused by having many sexual partners, engaging in early sexual activities and exposure to the HPV infection,” he said.

Dr Mugisha advised that to prevent young girls and women from getting cervical cancer, emphasis must be put on vaccination, delaying sex among young girls, screening for cancer among women aged 25 and above who are sexually active and faithfulness among married couples.

support
including
mentorst
to the
Engineer
profile, e
and bu
experts.

The
the m
enginee
Saharar
innova
to tran

On J
three 1
busine
front
Nairo
will
three
take
sh47

Eac
deve
lifeti
gro
tale
wor
eco
thr
sai
ab
cli
ac
th
b
o

h
T