

Malaria deaths in Uganda on the rise – WHO report

By Gloria Nakajubi

Despite Uganda's aggressive campaigns towards control and prevention of malaria over the years, the 2016 World Malaria Report shows that the number of people dying of the largely curable condition went up by 179.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) report that was released last month also shows that the country had the biggest share of malaria cases in the region at 18%, compared to Tanzania (11%), Rwanda (8%) and Kenya (14%). Malaria deaths in Uganda increased from 5,921 in 2014 to 6,100 in 2015.

However, the health ministry's acting director general of health services, Prof. Anthony Mbonye, attributed

the ugly statistic to an outbreak that occurred during the period in review (2014-2015).

According to Mbonye, in 2015, the country experienced malaria outbreaks in at least 10 districts in northern Uganda and two others in the southwestern region (Kabale and Kanungu).

The condition, he said, has since been contained and the general performance, especially in 2016, shows a decline in the incidences of malaria.

Ministry of Health statistics indicate that malaria incidence in children less than five years old reduced from 42% in 2009 to the current 19%. In areas such as Kampala, the incidence has since been brought down to almost 1%.

BETWEEN THE LINES:

■ To prevent malaria, the health ministry encourages people to sleep under insecticide-treated mosquito nets and keep surroundings free of mosquito breeding places such as bushes and stagnant water. They are also advised to obtain prompt referrals for any suspected case of malaria.

Mbonye stressed that the major challenge that needs to be addressed is sustainability of the gains at community level. This, he said, takes personal initiatives towards prevention.

Since 2015, Uganda has distributed 25.3 million insecticide-treated mosquito bed nets. According to the Malaria Indicator Survey (2014-2015), up to 90% of households have at least one insecticide-treated mosquito bed net.

However, Dr Myers Lugemwa of the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP) argued that the biggest challenge remains attitude change, especially regarding the proper use of mosquito nets.

He has also put forward a case for the controversial internal residual spraying, arguing that other than relying on an individual's adherence to the use of mosquito nets, getting rid of the malaria parasites would have a higher impact in the fight against malaria.

In general, the WHO report indicates a growing decline in malaria-related cases in the region (East and Southern Africa) with the estimated malaria case incidence decreasing by 22% between 2010 and 2015. Death as a result of malaria in general also reduced by a similar percentage (22%) in the same period.

Though most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa heavily rely on donor funding for malaria interventions, this saw a decrease from \$156m to \$150m between 2010 and 2015.

Malaria, according to the NMCP records, is still a major public health challenge with hospital records showing that it is responsible for 30% to 50% of outpatient hospital visits, 15% to 20% of hospital admissions and 9% to 14% of inpatient deaths.