



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

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PRESS RELEASE

UGANDA CONFIRMS POLIO OUTBREAK

KAMPALA, 17 August 2021 – The Ministry of Health has declared Polio a Public Health Emergency in Uganda following confirmation of positive laboratory tests from environmental samples in Kampala.

The samples were collected from the sewage plants in Bugolobi and Lubigi which are two of the sentinel environmental surveillance sites in Kampala. Results from the tests carried out at Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI) confirmed a circulating Vaccine Derived Polio Virus type 2 (cVDPV2). The virus detected has genetic linkage with a cVDPV2 strain reported in Sudan.

Uganda and the entire Africa were certified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as wild-Polio virus free in August 2020. Polio is a viral disease that is transmitted from person to person, mainly through a faecal-oral route or, less frequently, through contaminated water or food, and multiplies inside the intestines.

However, Polio resurged with another strain known as the 'Circulating Vaccine Derived Poliovirus (cVDPV)' that affects children in the communities with low immunity levels. In the past 12 months, over 19 African countries have declared cVDPV2 outbreaks, including three countries bordering Uganda: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, and Kenya.

While mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic, delivery of essential health services including routine immunization have been affected considerably, which implies fewer numbers of children were immunized against the vaccine-preventable diseases. This slowdown has led to resurgence of Polio globally, including Uganda.

The resurgence of Polio in Uganda may be attributed to the reduced routine immunization and Polio immunization rates in the country during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, incessant cross-border movements among our neighbouring countries and the countries from the Horn of Africa region currently affected by cVDPV2 outbreaks pose a risk of further Polio-importations to the country.

M. N. Nwete

At the forefront of the global Polio eradication efforts, Uganda was certified free of all Polioviruses in 2006. However, it has been under constant threat of Polio importation from other Polio-endemic countries in the region, as seen in 2009 and 2010 when Polio importations were reported in Mayuge and Bugiri respectively. In order to address this, the Ministry conducted a total of 23 cycles of national or sub-national Polio immunization campaigns.

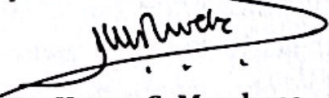
Polio does not respect borders and is spreading fast in the East African region putting children – particularly aged 5 years and below - at the risk of contracting this incurable disease yet vaccine preventable disease.

In response to the Polio outbreak, the Ministry of Health has heightened surveillance of Polio in the country by intensifying search for Polio cases in all health facilities by reporting and investigation of all children under fifteen years with sudden onset of paralysis or weakness in the arms or legs and expansion of environmental surveillance.

Additionally, the Ministry will conduct a nationwide Polio immunization campaign in October and December 2021 during which health-workers will visit house-to-house and vaccinate all children aged 5 years or below against Polio. All health workers participating in the campaign will wear masks and strictly observe the COVID-19 SOPs to ensure children are safely vaccinated.

In the meantime, parents and guardians are encouraged to ensure that all children under the age of five years are fully immunized as per the country's routine immunization schedule.

The Ministry of Health will announce the specific dates for the vaccination campaign through the national media, announcements, posters, and banners, to inform parents of the campaign and ensure that their children are vaccinated and protected from Polio.


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