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Uganda conducts preventative Polio immunization campaign

The Ministry of Health with support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) conducted a three-day preventative house-to-house polio immunization campaign reaching 5,570,000 children below the age of five in the 73 selected high-risk districts in Uganda.

The campaign was done to vaccinate all children under five years of age whether previously immunized or not, with Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) drops in the mouth, and achieve at least 95% coverage for vaccination in the selected districts.

The campaign covered 73 high-risk districts including Adjumani, Agago, Alebtong, Amolatar, Amuru, Arua, Budaka, Bududa, Bugiri, Bukwo, Bulambuli, Buliisa, Bundibugyo, Busia, Butaleja, Buyende, Dokolo, Hoima, Iganga, Isingiro, Jinja, Kaabong, Kabale, Kabarole, Kaliro, Kampala, Kamuli, Kamwenge, Kaniungu, Kapchorwa, Kasese, Kibaale, Kibuku, Kiryandongo, Kisoro, Kitgum, Koboko, Kole, Kween, Kyegegwa, Kyeihemba, Lamwo, Lira, Luuka, Manafwa, Maracha, Masindi, Mayuge, Mbale, Moyo, Namayingo, Namatumba, Nantoko, Ntoroko, Ntungamo, Nwoya, Otuke, Oyam, Pader, Pallisa, Rakai, Rukungiri, Sironko, Tororo, Wakiso, Yumbe, Zombo, Kagadi, Kakumiro, Omoro and Rubanda. The districts were selected based on the low routine immunization uptake, suboptimal polio surveillance indicators and areas hosting refugees. The campaign also provided an opportunity to sensitize communities on Acute Flaccid Paralysis surveillance and at the same time identify and investigate any unreported suspected cases of polio.

The National Professional Officer/ Routine immunization at WHO, Dr Emmanuel Tenywa highlighted the importance of the immunization exercise and said it was important to prevent the occurrence of a polio outbreak in the country. He also added that extra focus was put on the hard to reach populations to ensure they were not left out. "Previously, there was low immunization coverage on the lake shore areas and islands."

but we are ensuring that this is addressed and no one is left out", he said.

Dr Tenywa added that this was a supplemental campaign, and did not replace the routine immunization schedule.

During the house-to-house campaign, the vaccination team comprising of one health worker, one Local Council (LC1) or Village Health Team member moved door to door to administer the Polio vaccine which was given by putting two drops in the child's mouth.

During the support supervision exercise, WHO staff observed that some districts had fewer vaccines allocated than the district population. This was as a result of providing vaccines to homes that were outside their boundaries, an issue the Ministry of Health committed to addressing.

Further to this, there were pockets of resistance to the campaign due to cultural and religious beliefs in some districts, but with the assistance from the local council leadership and police as well as sensitization, the resistance was resolved and children were vaccinated. This was a result of sub optimal social mobilization prior to the exercise more so in the urban centres.

This preventive vaccination campaign was worth 7,357 billion Uganda shillings and was supported by funds from Government of Uganda, World Health Organization and UNICEF.

The effort to eradicate polio internationally is spearheaded by the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, a public-private partnership led by national governments with five partners – the World Health Organization (WHO), Rotary International, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Since its formation in 1988, the partnership has prevented over 16 million cases of polio paralysis. The last imported polio case in Uganda was in November 2010 in eastern Uganda.



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