Press Statement on upcoming National House-to-House Polio Immunization Campaign

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MINISTRY OF HEALTH
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Press Statement on House-to-House Polio Immunization campaign

On behalf of the Ministry of Health and the Government of Uganda, I take this opportunity to welcome you all to this press conference, convened to inform and update the public on the upcoming House to House Polio immunization campaign.

As you are aware, Vaccination is one of the key strategies that the Ministry of Health is implementing in its roadmap to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal four, which is the reduction of child mortality by two thirds. Currently, the sector has made good progress in child immunization increasing from DPT3 coverage of 52% in 2012 to current coverage of 97%.

Uganda was certified Polio free in October 2006 by the World Health Organization after Ten years of not reporting any indigenous Polio cases, however, with Polio cases being reported by the neighbouring countries and the porous nature of our borders which enables free movement of people amongst countries, Uganda remains at high risk of importing the Polio virus.

You will recall that Uganda experienced outbreaks of the Polio virus in February 2009 and October 2010 imported from South Sudan and Kenya respectively. In July 2011, a Polio case was detected in Kenya and investigations showed that this Polio case was closely linked to the Polio outbreak that occurred that year in Bugiri District.

In 2013 and early 2014, polio cases were again detected and reported in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya. Due to this threat, there is need to scale up our Polio immunization coverage and build up Herd Immunity to a level which interrupts the transmission of the Polio virus in Uganda.

The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) in consultation with national health authorities, global health initiatives, scientific experts, donors and other stakeholders, in response to a directive of
the World Health Assembly developed a Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan 2013–2018. This is a comprehensive, long-term strategy that addresses what is needed to deliver a polio-free world by 2018.

In addition, On 5 May 2014 the Director-General of the World Health Organization declared the international spread of wild poliovirus in 2014 a Public Health emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) under the International Health Regulations [IHR 2005], issued Temporary Recommendations to reduce the international spread of wild poliovirus, and requested a reassessment of this situation by the Emergency Committee every 3 months.

It is on this background therefore, that the Ministry of Health, with support from the World Health Organization, UNICEF and other partners are conducting a door-to-door Polio immunization campaign.

The objective of the campaign is to immunize all children below 5 years of age with 1 dose of trivalent Oral Polio Vaccine (tOPV). It is also intended to immunize all children below 5 years in selected 41 high risk districts with a second dose of trivalent Oral Polio Vaccine. The selected high risk districts have challenges of low performance in routine immunization, suboptimal polio surveillance indicators, an influx of refugees and massive cross border movements. We shall also use this opportunity to sensitize communities on Acute Flaccid Paralysis surveillance and at the same time identify and investigate any unreported suspected cases of polio.

The vaccination campaign will take place on Saturday 17th, Sunday 18th and Monday 19th. The vaccination teams will comprise of one health worker and one local council (LC1) official or VHT member. The teams will move house to house vaccinating all children in the target age group. Other places where children could be immunized from include markets, streets, places of worship or wherever they may be found. Special arrangements have been made for the island areas. Teams will be dispatched on motor boats.
The total estimated number of children to be reached during this year’s campaign is 7,506,231 children below 5 years of age in all the 112 districts of the country.

The Total Cost of this campaign is 14.9 Billion shillings, funded by World Health Organization for operational funds, UNICEF for social mobilisation and Government of Uganda handling the coordination and Implementation.

**Why House to House Strategy**

The reason behind the house to house campaign is due to the fact that there may be no one available at home to take the children to the Vaccination posts and in some instances; there may be lack of interest or motivation to have children vaccinated. Experience in many countries has shown that House to House campaigns are 20% more successful compared to fixed site strategies.

During the exercise, all children under 5 years of age whether previously immunised or not, will be given Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV) drops in the mouth.

However, this house to house Polio immunisation exercise does not replace the routine immunization services provided at the health facilities and outreach posts. Therefore, children below 1 year of age who have not received their full doses of the routine vaccination should be taken to the nearest health centre or outreach post to complete their immunization schedule. It is our desire that every child in Uganda should complete the recommended vaccinations by the end of their first year of life.

Finally, The Ministry of Health makes this appeal to the general public;

1. Parents and Guardians, please ensure that ALL your children below five years of age are immunised against Polio during this house to house immunisation exercise.
2. Please report any child under the age of 15 years who develops sudden weakness in the arms or legs to the nearest health facility for examination and appropriate management because it could be Polio.

Lastly, the Ministry of Health urges parents and caretakers to continuously take their children to health facilities and community outreaches for routine vaccination against all childhood killer diseases till they complete the recommended immunization schedule.

I thank you all

For God and My Country
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