

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF HEALTH

Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng

World Hepatitis Day on 28th July is one of the eight global public health campaigns commemorated each year by the World Health Organization, WHO. Since 2011, Every year, World Hepatitis Day is commemorated on the 28th, July to raise public awareness on viral hepatitis. Viral hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver that leads to complications such as liver cancer. There are five types of Hepatitis Virus; A, B, C, D and E. Hepatitis B and C alone, each year contribute to more than one million deaths globally. Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, we continue to lose lives everyday due to viral hepatitis.

Viral hepatitis is a highly endemic disease and a disease of public health concern in Uganda. In a survey conducted in 2016, it is estimated that the prevalence of viral hepatitis B in Uganda stands at 4.1% in the population aged 15-64 years. There is also regional variation of the disease prevalence, with the highest prevalence in the Mid- North at 4.6%, North-East 4.4%, West-Nile 3.8%, East- Central 2.7%, Mid-East 2.1%, Central 2.0%, Kampala 1.9%, Mid-West 1.8%, Central 1 1.6%, and the lowest in Southwest at 0.8%. While the actual prevalence of viral hepatitis C in Uganda is unknown, data from the National Blood Bank indicates that the prevalence of hepatitis C among blood donors in Uganda is approximately 1.5%.

Uganda continues to make strides towards achieving the World Health Organization (WHO) targets to eliminate Viral hepatitis by the year 2030. These include; continued coverage of over 95% of the

pentavalent vaccine which includes hepatitis B in the routine immunization program since 2013, mandatory testing and vaccination of all health care workers for Hepatitis B, screening of all donated blood against transfusable-transmittable Infections such as HIV, syphilis, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C, introduction of non-reusable injection devices at all public health care facilities and a phase-based approach testing and vaccinating the adult population for Hepatitis B beginning with regions with high prevalence scaling down to regions of low prevalence. Under the phased based approach, 105 districts out of 136 districts have been covered since September 2015. Over 4.8 million adolescents and adults have so far been tested and vaccinated and 280,000 people have been identified as positive for hepatitis B and linked into care and treatment.

This year, World Hepatitis Day will be held under the theme **"Hepatitis-free future"** with a strong focus on preventing Hepatitis B infection among mothers and newborns. Prevention of Mother-to-Child transmission (vertical transmission) is an important source of hepatitis B infection that accounts for majority of the cases in children under five years of age world-wide. Of those infected in the first five years of life, 90% are estimated to develop chronic liver infections in comparison to the less than 5% of infected adults that will develop chronic infection.

In order to reduce the rates of new hepatitis B infections among children, there is need to scale up



access to testing pregnant mothers during antenatal care services. Mothers who test positive for the disease with a high viral load are started on effective antivirals and the newborn vaccinated against hepatitis B within 24 hours of birth.

As Uganda joins the rest of the World to commemorate World Hepatitis Day, the Ministry of Health continues to appeal to the general public to;

- Embrace the available hepatitis B testing and vaccination services
- Educate yourself and others on the risks of viral hepatitis
- Share information about viral hepatitis

Finally, let us all act today to protect the future generation against viral Hepatitis infection.

Thank You.

For God and my country

Hon. Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng
Minister of Health



MESSAGE OF WHO REGIONAL DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA Dr. Matshidiso Moeti

the Region, would prevent over 1.5 million new infections and 1.2 million deaths from liver cancer by 2035.

Hepatitis B can go undetected for years and have devastating consequences. For example, Ansah, a 25-year old Ghanaian woman, was diagnosed with hepatitis B and liver cancer during antenatal care. Her baby was protected with hepatitis B birth-dose vaccination administered within 24 hours of birth, but Ansah's future is uncertain. Her family said: "We did not know that the infection could be so silent and the consequences so grave".

Despite the low cost of the hepatitis B birth-dose vaccine, only 13 African countries have introduced it, far short of the target of 25 countries by 2020. So far, 15 countries have launched national hepatitis plans, and Rwanda and Uganda have national testing and treatment programmes for hepatitis.

WHO is working with countries and partners to accelerate action towards a 90% reduction of new hepatitis B and C infections and a 65% reduction of deaths by 2030. Achieving these goals requires urgent introduction and scaling-up of hepatitis B birth-dose vaccination and leveraging the HIV and syphilis infrastructure to

prevent mother-to-child transmission and ensure mothers have access to testing and treatment. I commend the Organization of African First Ladies, in this regard for advocating triple elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B.

As we battle COVID-19, the threat of further delays to scaling-up hepatitis B birth-dose vaccination and other essential hepatitis services looms large. People with hepatitis-related complications are at a higher risk of developing severe cases of COVID-19 and must continue to receive essential hepatitis prevention and treatment services during the pandemic and beyond.

With political commitment from governments and partners, backed by financing and integrated using a health system strengthening approach, and with informed and empowered communities, we can achieve a #HepFreeFuture.

Learn more:

Prevention, care and treatment of viral hepatitis in the African Region: Framework for action, 2016–2020

Hepatitis B Birth Dose Investment Case, Vaccine Investment Strategy, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, 2018

On 28 July, we commemorate World Hepatitis Day to increase awareness of this public health threat. Of the 71 million Africans with chronic viral hepatitis, 300 people sadly lose their lives daily from liver cancer and other complications related to hepatitis B and C infections.

This year's theme is "Hep Free Future" highlighting the importance of preventing mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B and scaling-up prevention, testing and treatment to control hepatitis B and cure hepatitis C.

Hepatitis B comprises 85% of the hepatitis burden in the WHO African Region. The most vulnerable time for infection is in the first month of life, and this can be prevented with hepatitis B birth-dose vaccination in the first 24 hours of life. Achieving at least 90% coverage in