

How Uganda cut malaria deaths in babies by half

BY TONNY ABET

KAMPALA. Hospitals across Uganda are recording a steady decline in malaria admissions and deaths among children under five, marking a major public health gain in a country that has long carried one of the world's heaviest malaria burdens.

An analysis of Ministry of Health data shows that over the last three financial years, malaria admissions among babies dropped sharply, while deaths among hospitalised children in this age group were reduced by nearly half.

Health officials attribute the gains to a combination of prevention measures, improved treatment, and the recent roll-out of the malaria vaccine.

“The decline is a result of multiple interventions working together,” Dr Lugemwa said.

children under five declined from 390,911 cases in the 2022/2023 financial year to 302,949 in 2024/2025 financial year, a reduction of close to 90,000 cases.

Over the same period, deaths among hospitalised children fell from 2,321 to 1,249, representing a drop of almost 50 percent.

Dr Myers Lugemwa, the head of the Malaria Control Programme at the Ministry of Health, says the improvement reflects sustained investment in prevention and early treatment, alongside the introduction of the malaria vaccine.

“The decline is a result of multiple interventions working together,” Dr Lugemwa said.



14%
REDUCTION IN
CASES

“The vaccine is important, but it is not a magic bullet. It must be combined with other measures such as consistent use of mosquito nets and indoor residual spraying,” Dr Lugemwa added.

Uganda introduced the malaria vaccine in April 2025 in 107 districts with the highest disease burden, targeting children aged between six and 11 months. According to the health sector performance report, by the end of the 2024/2025 financial year, 96 percent of the targeted population had received the first dose.

“A few areas are already reporting fewer cases of severe malaria; that is exactly what the vaccine is meant to do, but families must continue using bed nets even after vaccination,” Dr Lugemwa said.

To reinforce prevention efforts, the Ministry of Health launched another wave of mosquito net distribution in December 2025.

Health minister Dr Jane Ruth Aceng said the ministry is preparing for a nationwide campaign this month, during

ABOUT MALARIA VACCINE

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which 25.8 million mosquito nets will be distributed free of charge.

Under the first wave, districts with a high malaria burden, including parts of Lango, Busoga and Bukedi, are receiving nets.

Dr Jimmy Opigo, a former head of the Malaria Control Division, also said hospitals have become more efficient in managing severe malaria cases, reducing delays that often prove fatal.

“We are also promoting the use of medicines for prevention, because if you clear parasites from people, mos-

quitoes have nothing to transmit,” he added.

According to ministry data, insecticide-treated net coverage stood at 76 percent as of June 2025. Malaria incidence also declined from 280 cases per 1,000 people in the 2023/2024 financial year to 260 per 1,000 in 2024/2025, a drop officials attribute to indoor residual spraying in West Nile and Buke-di, and seasonal malaria chemoprophylaxis in Karamoja.

Overall, the health sector performance report indicates a 14.1 percent reduction in malaria cases in 2024/2025 compared to the previous year.

Despite the progress, vaccine uptake beyond the first dose remains a concern. While nearly all targeted children received the initial dose, only 33 percent completed the second dose and just nine percent received the third.

Dr Richard Kabanda, the commissioner for health promotion, urged parents to ensure children complete the full vaccination schedule while maintaining other preventive practices. “The vaccine only protects against severe malaria; it does not replace bed nets or other measures,” he said.