

GOVT REDUCES HPV VACCINE TO ONE DOSE

By Annabel Oyera

The Government has revised its human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination schedule from two doses to just one, in line with new international guidelines.

This vaccine aims at protecting young girls from cervical cancer, the leading form of cancer among Ugandan women. It claims over 4,000 lives annually in Uganda, largely due to late diagnosis.

Under its vaccination programme, the Ministry of Health targets girls aged 10 to ensure long-term protection. In this new schedule, immunocompromised girls will continue to receive two doses.

IMMUNISATION UPDATE

Presenting an update on routine immunisation, Dr Michael Baganizi, the programme manager of the Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation (UNEPI), said the decision to adopt a single-dose HPV schedule is in line with the guidelines of the World Health Organisation (WHO).

"One dose of the HPV vaccine has been proven to provide the same level of protection as two doses. This shift simplifies delivery, improves uptake and allows us to protect more girls," Dr Baganizi said during a Ministry of Health



Dr Atwiine



Dr Baganizi

media breakfast meeting on routine immunisation held at Lourdel Towers. He noted that simplifying the schedule will help address missed second doses, especially in school-based vaccination programmes.

CANCER PREVENTION

Addressing the media, Dr Diana Atwiine, the health ministry permanent secretary, said the policy shift is a major step towards eliminating cervical cancer in Uganda.

"Our goal is full coverage; if all girls receive the vaccine, cervical cancer can eventually be eliminated, saving lives and reducing the huge costs associated with cancer treatment," Dr Atwiine said.

She urged parents and guardians to take advantage of the revised schedule and called on private schools to allow vaccination teams access to their learners to ensure equitable coverage. Vaccines are provided free of charge at

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ Nationwide routine immunisation performance remains strong, with most antigens achieving coverage above 90% in 2025

all Government health facilities and accredited outreach points across the country.

14 IMMUNISABLE DISEASES

Beyond HPV, Uganda's routine immunisation programme continues to protect children against 14 vaccine-preventable diseases, including polio, tuberculosis, measles, rubella, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, rotavirus diarrhoea, Hib meningitis, hepatitis B, yellow fever, malaria and cervical cancer.

"The progress from six killer diseases to 14 immunisable diseases demonstrates the power of vaccination in



A woman being screened for cervical cancer by medical staff. The HPV vaccine targets girls aged 10 to ensure long-term protection

OTHER VACCINATIONS

■ In 2025, Uganda introduced the hepatitis B birth dose to prevent mother-to-child transmission. Coverage currently stands at 75% and complements the pentavalent vaccine given at six, 10 and 14 weeks. "Children vaccinated at birth are protected for life against hepatitis B, which is a major cause of liver cancer and chronic liver disease," Dr Atwiine said.

■ Uganda has also transitioned yellow fever prevention from mass campaigns to routine immunisation, with over 30 million people vaccinated nationwide. International travel certification is available at regional referral hospitals at sh10,000.

■ Mpox vaccination has also yielded results, with over 350,000 doses administered in 45 districts and a clear decline in cases, particularly in early-vaccinated urban areas.

preventing illness and saving lives," Dr Atwiine said.

Dr Baganizi reported that routine immunisation performance remains strong, with most antigens achieving coverage above 90% in 2025. Services are delivered through public and private health facilities, as well as regular

outreach programmes in hard-to-reach areas such as islands and mountainous regions.

The health ministry permanent secretary noted that urban districts like Kampala and Wakiso have some of the highest numbers of zero-dose children, largely due to misinformation and complacency.

MALARIA VACCINE ROLLOUT

In April 2025, Uganda introduced the malaria vaccine in 107 high-burden districts, the largest rollout worldwide. The vaccine is administered in four doses at six, seven, eight and 18 months.

Dr Baganizi said over one million children have received the first dose, exceeding targets. However, only 67% have received the second dose and 47% the third.

"Completion of all four doses is critical. The vaccine does not completely prevent malaria infection, but it significantly reduces severe disease and death," he said.

Despite progress, vaccine hesitancy fuelled by misinformation remains a key challenge especially in urban settings.

Sustaining public engagement through religious institutions, community leaders, women's groups and the media is a priority.