

BY SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

**KAMPALA:** Health experts have said proper use of baby diapers can play a supportive role in preventing hypothermia among newborns, a condition that continues to contribute significantly to neonatal deaths in Uganda.

Hypothermia occurs when a newborn's body temperature drops below normal due to poor heat regulation, a risk particularly for preterm and low-birth-weight babies whose temperature control systems are not fully developed.

Speaking yesterday during the launch of a partnership between the Ministry of Health and Softcare Uganda Limited to distribute diapers to regional referral hospitals, the assistant Commissioner for Reproductive and Infant Health, Dr John Paul Bagala, said maintaining warmth immediately after birth is critical for newborn survival.

"Maintaining warmth immediately after birth is essential. While kangaroo mother care, warm clothing, and heated rooms remain primary interventions, absorbent and dry diapers can also help prevent heat loss," Dr Ba-

# Diapers could save newborns from cold stress – experts

gala said. According to the Ministry of Health, temperature-related complications affect an estimated 22 out of every 1,000 newborns, contributing significantly to neonatal illness and deaths.

**Keeping babies dry**

Dr Bagala explained that diapers help reduce heat loss by keeping newborns dry, noting that wet clothing or nappies can quickly lower a baby's body temperature.

"When a newborn stays wet, especially in the first hours and days of life, the risk of losing body heat increases. Keeping the baby dry is one of the simple but effective steps in preventing hypothermia," he said.

He added that disposable diapers are designed to absorb moisture quickly, helping maintain a stable body environment, particularly in busy health facilities where immediate changing may not always be possible.

Uganda continues to grapple with high neonatal mortality, with prematurity, birth asphyxia, and infections

among the leading causes of newborn deaths.

"In our country, the leading causes of newborn mortality include prematurity,

## BACKGROUND

**Preterm and low-birth-weight infants are particularly at risk of cold stress because their bodies have not fully developed the ability to regulate temperature. Unlike full-term babies, they have thinner skin, less body fat, and immature internal systems, making it harder for them to stay warm. Even small drops in ambient temperature or prolonged exposure to moisture can quickly lower their body temperature, increasing the risk of complications such as slowed heart rate, breathing difficulties, and weakened immunity.**

ty, complications during birth, asphyxia, and sepsis. Preterm babies especially struggle to regulate their body temperature," Dr Bagala said.

Under the partnership, Softcare Uganda Limited will supply diapers to regional referral hospitals to improve hygiene and newborn care practices.

Mr Festo Mugisha, the assistant managing director of Softcare Uganda Limited, said the initiative aims to support both newborn health and girls' education through the provision of sanitary products in schools.

"We have realised that many girls drop out of school because they cannot access sanitary towels. This partnership will contribute to reducing that challenge," Mr Mugisha said.

He added that affordable diapers could significantly improve hygiene conditions for mothers and newborns in health facilities.

However, he appealed to the government to consider reducing taxes on diapers to make them more affordable for

low-income families.

"We hope taxes can be reduced so prices become favourable. Currently, a diaper costs between Shs500 and Shs800, which is still high for many families," he said.

**Midwives highlight risks**

Ms Jennifer Achora, a midwife at Kawempe National Referral Hospital, said hypothermia poses a serious threat, particularly to premature babies.

"Preterm babies are born before their body systems fully develop. Even slight exposure to cold can push them into hypothermia, which requires immediate intervention," she said.

She explained that while incubators help regulate temperature, diapers play an important complementary role by preventing babies from remaining in wet conditions.

"Even when babies are in incubators, keeping them dry is very important. Diapers help ensure they are not exposed to moisture, which can worsen cold stress," Ms Achora said.