

The deaths are attributed to use of herbs to induce labour, poor presentation of babies at birth, post-maturity cases, infections and congenital abnormalities.

BY ROBERT MUHEREZA

Health workers have attributed the high rate of neonatal deaths in the districts of Kabale and Rubanda to pregnant mothers' failure to attend antenatal clinics.

Some mothers also risk delivering at home with the help of Traditional Birth Attendants.

Health officials from Rubanda and Kabale districts said at the weekend that about 132 neonatal deaths were recorded between July and December last year, and called for strict adherence to preventive interventions to reverse the trend.

"We urge the public, especially pregnant mothers, to follow our preventive interventions, which include attending antenatal care early and heeding government advice to deliver at health facilities," Mr Alfred Besigensi, the Kabale District health educator, said.

"If the trend remains the same, the number of babies lost may rise to 200 by the end of the financial year," he added.

Mr Besigensi revealed that between July and December last year, they had so far lost about 100 babies due to pregnant mothers' failure to follow antenatal care

Why neonatal deaths are rampant in Kigezi region



Health workers take care of newborn babies at the Neonatal Care Unit at Rugarama Hospital in Kabale District in April 2025. PHOTO/ROBERT MUHEREZA

guidelines.

Other mothers reported late to health centres when already in labour, putting their lives and those of their babies at risk.

According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) 2022/2023 re-

port, the maternal mortality ratio in the Kigezi stands at 541 deaths per 100,000 live births, higher than the national average of 336 per 100,000 live births.

The UDHS report attributes the high rate to several factors, including a high number of mothers giving birth at

home, poor health facilities, and limited access to skilled healthcare services.

The Rubanda District Health Officer, Dr Abdon Birungi, said between July and December last year, 32 neonatal deaths and one maternal death were recorded.

"While neonatal death exists in three

4.3 RATE

Fertility rate. According to the 2024 National Population and Housing Census, the Kigezi region has a fertility rate of 4.3 births per woman, slightly higher than the Ankole region but lower than the national average of 4.5 births per woman.

forms—fresh neonatal, early neonatal, and macerated—mothers must ensure they undergo ultrasound scan services to understand the positioning and condition of their babies in the womb," he said.

"Seeking antenatal services during pregnancy is important for the health of both the mother and the expected newborn. Health workers should always carry out proper screening to determine the size of the baby," Dr Birungi advised.

He also warned pregnant mothers in the district against using the services of TBA.

"Twenty-five percent of pregnant mothers in our district deliver their babies at home with the help of TBA. This trend must stop to save mothers and their children from maternal and neonatal deaths," Dr Birungi said.