

Regional News

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Hospital records indicate that malaria accounts for about 45 percent of all paediatric admissions.

BY PHOEBE MASANGOLE & FRED WAMBEDE

Mbale Regional Referral Hospital is facing a surge in paediatric malaria cases, with health workers warning that delays in treatment, poor sanitation, and inconsistent use of mosquito nets are driving more children into life-threatening conditions.

Doctors at the facility say the paediatric ward is increasingly overwhelmed by young patients presenting with high fever, vomiting, convulsions, and extreme weakness—hallmark symptoms of severe malaria. Most of the critical cases, they note, could be avoided with early diagnosis and prompt treatment.

Dr Julian Abeso, the head of the paediatrics department, said malaria-related admissions have risen sharply, particularly among children under five years.

“We are witnessing an alarming surge of children arriving with life-threatening malaria—severe anaemia, convulsions, even unconsciousness,” Dr Abeso said.

“Immediate, rapid treatment could prevent these tragedies. Delaying care puts children’s lives in grave danger,” she added.

Hospital records indicate that malaria accounts for about 45 percent of all paediatric admissions, making it the leading cause of hospitalisation among children. Of these cases, roughly eight in 10 involve children below the age of five.

Mortality among severe cases is estimated at between two and three percent, largely attributed to late presentation at health facilities.

“Late cases are harder and costlier to treat, and this puts a strain on already limited resources,” Dr Abeso said.

The situation has stretched the hospital’s capacity, with the paediatric ward frequently operating beyond its limits.

The Mbale City Health Officer, Dr Moses Mugonya, described the trend as a public health emergency requiring urgent intervention at both household

Mbale child malaria spike reveals health system gaps



Dr Julian Abeso, the head of the paediatrics department at Mbale hospital, hands over a mosquito net to a mother as Mbale City marked World Malaria Day on April 25. PHOTO /PHOEBE MASANGOLE

and community levels.

“Malaria is not a simple fever in children; once it becomes severe, it can affect vital organs such as the brain, liver, and blood system,” Dr Mugonya said.

He added that many children are still being brought to health facilities only after the disease has significantly progressed, reducing the chances of recovery.

Ms Justine Namutosi, whose five-year-old daughter is recovering from severe malaria at the hospital, said the illness initially appeared to be a mild fever.

“She complained of body pain and lost appetite. We gave her painkillers and thought it was just a normal fever,” Ms Namutosi said. “Sometimes she would sleep without properly using the mosquito net.”

Within two days, her condition worsened.

“She became very weak, developed



Call to action.

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a high fever, and started vomiting. When she began shaking and speaking strangely, we rushed her to the hospital,” she added.

Local health officials attribute the spike in infections partly to environmental conditions that favour mosquito breeding.

Mr Nathan Wasike, the chairperson of

the Mbale Hospitality Association, said stagnant water, poor drainage, and overgrown vegetation around homes are creating ideal conditions for mosquitoes.

“Many communities have stagnant water where mosquitoes breed easily. We also see overgrown bushes around homes, which increase mosquito populations,” he said.

He added that the situation worsens during the rainy season, when drainage channels overflow and water collects in containers and open spaces, while poor waste disposal increases breeding sites.

A study conducted by students at Busitema University in Bugisu Sub-region found that children who stay outdoors late into the evening—playing or watching television—are at higher risk of mosquito bites during peak hours. It also highlighted inconsistent use of mosquito nets as a major challenge.

“Even when nets are available, many people do not use them properly, leaving

KEY FACTS IN MBALE

- Malaria accounts for about 45 percent of paediatric admissions at Mbale Regional Referral Hospital.
- Eight in 10 cases involve children under five.
- Severe cases make up more than half of critical admissions.
- Death rate in severe cases stands at 2–3 percent.
- Main drivers: delayed treatment, poor net use, and sanitation gaps.

children exposed during peak mosquito hours,” the study noted.

Efforts to curb the spread of malaria are ongoing. Mbale City recently marked World Malaria Day on April 25 under the theme “Together we can end malaria: Elgon Ngoma Awareness Campaign,” with a focus on prevention and early treatment.

The outreach, supported by Rotarians Against Malaria and local partners, including the hospital, saw hundreds of mosquito nets distributed to expectant mothers and the elderly.

Mr Julius Wolimbwa, the director of the Elgon Ngoma Troupe, said community-based interventions are helping strengthen malaria response through training of community health promoters to support early detection and health education.

“These efforts are improving early detection, prevention, and treatment, especially in hard-to-reach areas,” he said.

Ms Esther Winnie Kuloba, a Rotarian and founder of Ztriel Ushers & Events, said the Mbale Central Market was selected for outreach because of its high concentration of working mothers who are often exposed to mosquito bites in the evening.