

# RISK FACTORS FOR CONDITION INCLUDE ALCOHOLISM AND SMOKING

By Paul Kiuuwa

Out of the 1.6 million babies that are born in Uganda annually, over 8,000 have congenital heart disease, the executive director of the Uganda Heart Institute (UHI) has disclosed.

"These babies' conditions are severe enough to merit heart intervention [surgery]. Congenital heart disease involves structural abnormalities of the heart present at birth. It is a broad category affecting how blood flows through the heart and lungs," Dr John Omagino, the executive director of the of the Uganda Heart Institute, said.

He made the remarks while presenting a paper on heart ailments in Uganda at the Speke Resort Hotel Munyonyo in Kampala on Friday, during the fourth Annual National Test and Treat Initiative Conference.

The conference was held under the theme: *Advancing Regionalisation and Strengthening Health System Sustainability to Achieve Comprehensive Test & Treat Interventions by 2030.*

Delegates from over 44 countries attended the event

## 8,000 BABIES BORN WITH CONGENITAL HEART DISEASES ANNUALLY - EXPERT

### HEALTHY DIET

Prof. Alice Lamwaka, the head of the pharmacy/biotechnology department at Gulu University, advised people to maintain organic diets if they are to avoid heart ailments.

She said relying on whole foods rather than processed diets strengthens the immune system and increases overall life expectancy.

to discuss strengthening primary healthcare, laboratory innovations, as well as expanding diagnosis and treatment networks.

Speaking to *New Vision* after the conference, Omagino said UHI can only handle a few



**Congenital heart diseases affect how blood flows through the heart and lungs**

patients with heart defects.

"We have one operating theatre, one catheterisation laboratory and 16 beds. We can only work on about 1,000

babies with congenital heart diseases annually. The rest are referred abroad for surgeries abroad yet many cannot afford," he said.

Omagino urged the Government to improve UHI's capacity to treat heart patients.

"Many die without diagnosis and treatment," he said.

The UHI boss said the babies who suffer from congenital heart disease are weak, underweight, breathe with difficulty and delay to sit, stand and walk, calling upon caregivers to be vigilant.

"The children do not like to breastfeed," Omagino said.

He said some of the risk factors are mothers giving birth when they are old/young, alcoholism, smoking and infections such as syphilis.

Omagino added that diets heavy in carbohydrates and sugars, especially fast foods, increase the risk of developing hypertension (high blood pressure), noting that one in four adult Ugandans suffers from the condition.

"It often develops silently without early warning signs. It is one of the drivers of heart failure and stroke in the country," Omagino said.

He said most people living with hypertension are not aware of their condition.

Omagino called on adults to avoid smoking and alcoholism, but to instead regularly exercise, monitor their blood pressure and adopt a diet low in salt and processed sugars.