

Free diarrhea vaccination starts next year

By PATRICK JARAMOGI & JOHN AGABA

Government has secured funds under the GAVI initiative to vaccinate all children against diarrhea, minister of state for health in charge of General Duties Ms. Sarah Kataike disclosed yesterday.

The free vaccination kicks off next year. Kataike who was opening the third annual journalism Health Conference at the Imperial Royale hotel in Kampala pointed out that diarrhea vaccines follow the new pneumococcal vaccines that kick off in April.

“We are starting by issuing out the pneumonia vaccines in two months time then follow up with the diarrhea and vaccines for cancer of the cervix,” she said.

The vaccines, rotavirus and pneumococcal, will protect children under five years against pneumonia and diarrhea.

Rotavirus is the leading cause of severe diarrhea, which kills more than 500,000 children under five every year, nearly half of them in Africa. Rotavirus vaccines are now given as part of the standard immunizations in developed countries such as Canada and the United States.

Kataike noted that the provision of the vaccines was not an option but a right. “80 percent of the diseases in Uganda are preventable that is why the government is committed to prevention rather than cure,” she said.

She said immunization against diarrhea will start in January, next year. “Researches have shown that vaccines are the way forward in the fight against diseases that kill children especially those below the age of five,” she said.

Since it was set up in the year 2000, the GAVI Alliance has helped countries to protect an additional 370 million children from potentially fatal diseases and has prevented more than 5.5 million future deaths. Cathy Mwesigwa Kizza the Deputy Editor New Vision said the conference whose theme is promoting preventive Health is geared towards equipping journalists with the right skills to report on health issues.

Dr. Margaret Mungherera the President Uganda and World Medical Association reiterated the need for “one health” where all stakeholders speak the same voice when it comes to health issues.

“We are not coordinated when it comes to health issues. Every body seems to be talking something different. We need a unified voice on this,” she said. She stressed the need for government to increase funding on prevention rather than on cure emphasizing increased funding in areas of clean water, sanitation, environmental conservation and animal health.

She urged journalists to team up with the Uganda Medical Council to wipe out quack doctors whom she described as a threat to their profession.

“My appeal is for you to help us wipe out these quack doctors. Out of the 6,000 doctors in Uganda only 3,500 have renewed their licenses meaning the rest are operating illegally,” she said. She urged the broadcast platforms to deny such medics the platform to deliberate on health issues.

The three day conference organized by the Health Journalists Network in Uganda (HEJNU) attracted over 80 print, radio and TV journalists from across Uganda. **Ends**