

Tanzania streaks ahead on vaccine programme

TANZANIA has set a world record in national immunisation coverage, thanks to the government-backed national immunisation and vaccine programme currently under implementation.



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A new report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) says the country has attained 97%, surpassing the target by the Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP).

The rate is measured by the percentage of children receiving the third dose of the diphtheria-tetanus- pertussis vaccine (DTP3).

The permanent secretary (PS) in the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elders and Children, Dr Mpoki Ulisubisya, said that Tanzania was currently at 98% on immunisation and vaccine, saying the country is headed for 100%.

"We have already conducted a series of meetings with all district officials countrywide and we have agreed that we should meet our target by ensuring that immunisation reaches 100%," said the PS.

According to extracts taken the maiden report on the *Status of Immunisation in Africa*, Tanzania is doing remarkably well in taking initiatives to prevent and combat diseases.

For the first time, WHO has published immunisation data at the sub-national level for over 140 member states worldwide.

Dr Dafrossa Lyimo, programme manager for immunisation and vaccine said that the success rate was a result of the ongoing Reach Every Child strategy that makes immunisation an important treatment for every child in the country.

Among other strategies, Lyimo said, the government in collaboration with other financiers was allocating funds that are availed to all public and private health centres to ensure every child is vaccinated.

According to the report, Tanzania is one of the only 11 countries in Africa that fund over 50 per cent of their national immunisation programmes. With a population of 50-million, Tanzania has recently introduced the measles second dose vaccine (MCV2), putting the country on track to eliminate measles by 2020.

As Africa nears polio eradication, critical funding for immunisation through the polio eradication programme is expected to decrease which means each country should brace to foot own bills, to that effect.

While Africa has made significant gains towards increasing access to immunisation in the past few decades, immunisation coverage has recently stagnated at 74%, with exception of Tanzania.

According to the Regional Immunisation Technical Advisory Group (RITAG), Africa is about to face several funding transitions that will make domestic investments in immunisation more critical than ever.

As Africa nears polio eradication, critical funding for immunisation through the polio eradication programme is expected to ramp down. "Additionally, countries approaching middle-income status will transition away from Gavi support for immunisation in the coming years. Countries, including Tanzania, must prepare now to fill these gaps, so that progress on immunisation is not reversed," says the report.

The national coverage data often conceals large inequalities in coverage and access within the country that can be discovered through sub-national monitoring. Targeting specific sub-national areas with focused interventions will help countries achieve high and equitable coverage and meet their GVAP and RSPI targets.

Several countries, Tanzania included, have also introduced the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) and the rotavirus vaccine to protect the two biggest child killers - pneumonia and diarrhoea.

As far as measles elimination is concerned, the RSPI has set ambitious targets for the continent. And, to achieve elimination by 2020, the framework calls for at least 95% national and sub-national coverage with the measles-containing first dose (MCV1) vaccine.

Source: *Daily News*

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