

KAMPALA/Uganda, 13 July 2011 – Uganda today announced that it has eliminated maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT). The country is the 20th to do so since 2000.

“This is a historic achievement for Uganda, and the Government should be applauded for their commitment to eliminating this killer disease,” said Dr. Sharad Sapra, UNICEF Uganda Country Representative. “We are also very grateful to our partners in the Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Elimination Initiative. It is through these kinds of innovative partnerships that we can truly make a difference in the lives of so many.”

Between 2002 and 2009, 25 high-risk districts in Uganda were targeted for intervention, and close to two million women of child bearing age received three doses of tetanus vaccines in those areas.

In compliance with the World Health Organization’s guidelines, the most at-risk district for MNT in a given country must have no recorded cases for a specific period of time in order to claim elimination. In 2010, Uganda reported it had eliminated the disease – and this year, a validation survey has taken place, confirming Uganda’s elimination campaign has been successful.

Newborn babies can contract tetanus if the umbilical cord is cut with an unclean instrument or if a harmful substance such as ash or cow dung is applied to the cord, a traditional practice in some African countries. If contracted, the infection can cause a baby to develop muscle spasms that eventually stop it from breathing. MNT is among the most common lethal consequences of unclean deliveries and umbilical cord-care practices. When tetanus develops, mortality rates are extremely high, especially when appropriate medical care is not available.

Yet maternal and neonatal tetanus deaths can be easily prevented by immunizing mothers with the tetanus vaccine and emphasizing hygienic delivery and cord care practices.

“Protection against tetanus is the first immunization a child receives,” said Dr. Sapra. “It is actually given before a pregnant mother gives birth. A woman immunized against tetanus before she delivers will be protected against the disease and the vaccine will also protect her

baby.”

Other countries that have achieved elimination include Bangladesh, Burundi, Egypt, Mozambique, Rwanda, Turkey and South Africa. Globally, there are 38 countries where MNT is still a public health problem, and the MNTE initiative is focused on achieving elimination in those countries, as well.

For Uganda and other countries that have achieved elimination, continued emphasis on tetanus vaccination drives must continue as MNT can only be eliminated, not eradicated.

“With the continued support from the initiative and the continued commitment from the Government of Uganda, we are confident that MNT will not return to Uganda and unnecessarily claim lives,” said Dr. Sapra.

The Maternal and Neonatal Tetanus Elimination campaign in Uganda was implemented in 2002. The campaign is supported by the MNT Elimination Initiative, an international private-public partnership that includes UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, GAVI, USAID/Immunization Basics, CDC, UNICEF National Committees, the Government of Japan and JICA, Save the Children, PATH, RMHC, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Kiwanis International, Pampers – a division of Proctor & Gamble, and Becton, Dickinson and Company.

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