

Health experts applaud high uptake of Pneumonia vaccines in Mombasa County

Experts say the disease is caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcus) and added that the disease has more than 91 known serotypes. A spot check in some of the public health facilities in the county show that thousands of Children are administered with the vaccine every year. Some of the public health facilities offering the vaccination schedules include Mlaleo, Kisauni, Mrima, and Vikwatani Sub- County hospitals among other public health utilities.

Anthony Shume, a medical practitioner from Kisauni Sub County said the Pneumococcal disease is caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcus) and added that the disease has more than 91 known serotypes. Dr. Shume further noted that some of the major clinical syndromes include life-threatening infections such as pneumonia and meningitis.

He said "Pneumococcus is the most identified cause of community-acquired pneumonia. It is also a major cause of milder but more common illnesses, such as sinusitis and otitis media."

Dr. Shume highlighted that the organism frequently colonizes the nasopharynx of healthy people, particularly young children, without causing illness. Another health expert from Jomvu Sub County who spoke on condition of anonymity noted that the disease is more susceptible to children below the age of five. The expert further added that the disease has a higher mortality rate in developing Countries. "Pneumonia most affects children under five years. And causes a high mortality in developing countries," the Expert said.

At the same time Dr. Shume says the Pneumococcal vaccine is administered in three doses given at 6, 10 and 14 weeks of age and a 0.5mls of vaccine injected intramuscularly into the anterior upper, outer aspects of the right thigh. Dr. Shume pointed out that the pneumococcal vaccines available and licensed in the Kenya market include the Conjugate vaccines 10 & 13 valent, A 23-valent polysaccharide vaccine suitable for children above two years of age and for the elderly.

Meanwhile, Maureen Kaingu, a clinician from Likoni Sub County said Pneumonia symptoms vary, including a cough with phlegm or pus; a fever may also exhibit with chills and difficulty breathing and added that patients may also experience strong pains in the chest, dehydration and fatigue. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health, through the National Vaccines and Immunization Program is committed to a global goal of controlling, eliminating and eradicating all vaccine-preventable diseases throughout the country.

The NVIP Guidelines are aimed at guiding implementation of immunization at all levels and ensure uniformity and standardization aligned on delivery of its mandates. The Kenya National Immunization Policy Guidelines aim at improving the quality of immunization and primary healthcare services in the country. It was established in 1980, and currently provides 14 vaccines and 5 non-EPI vaccines (Hepatitis B, Anti-snake venom, Anti-rabies, Yellow Fever and Typhoid vaccines).

These vaccines are provided to more than 1.5 million infants and a similar number of pregnant women and 700,000 young girls every year. A recent UNICEF report produced in April 2024 showed that paediatric pneumonia was responsible for the death of 800,000 children annually. As a body that champions for social and behaviour change in the community, CBCC Africa (Centre for Behaviour Change and Communication) was established in 2011.

CBCC Africa aims at achieving transformation in communities by providing comprehensive social behaviour change. The organisation works in all the 47 counties and partners with both international and local organizations, national and county governments in providing social and behaviour change.



Health experts follow through a health session with a caregiver and her baby in a public health facility. Image: Mwarandu Nzai

CBCC Africa through a partnership with UNICEF Kenya has been supporting uptake of vaccination from childhood to adulthood through a multimedia campaign on the Digiredio Social and Behaviour Change platform, consisting of community and regional radio stations. CBCC with the MoH National Vaccines and Immunisation Program has been targeting both Children and adolescents as part of an integrated routine immunization system for the promotion of universal health coverage.

The uptake of various vaccines is however low due to various factors that includes parental fears on safety of the vaccine, personal, cultural, and religious reasons and Parental misinformation and disinformation. To increase immunization and vaccine uptake and support this campaign, CBCC Africa and NVIP have positioned caregivers and young people as social and peer influencers. The campaign has been targeting caregivers and teenagers in 31 counties including Elgeyo Marakwet, Lamu Mombasa, Taita Taveta, Embu, Meru, Tharaka Nithi, Kitui, Machakos, Nyandarua and Nyeri among others.

By Peter Mwarandu