



Republic of Namibia

STATEMENT

BY

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MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES*

**DURING THE LAUNCHING OF THE NEW VACCINE,
PENTAVALENT (DPT, HEPB, HIB B) INTO THE EXISTING
ROUTINE IMMUNIZATION PROGRAMME**

Windhoek, 07 September 2009

Programme Director, Mr. K. Kahuure, PS, MoHSS
Representative of the WHO Country Representative, Dr. Desta Tiruneh,
The UNICEF Country Representative, Mr. Ian Macleod,
The UNFPA Country Representative, Mr. Fabian Byomuhangi,
Hon. Governor of Khomas Region, Ms. Sophia Shaningwa
Hon. Regional and Local Councillors,
Representatives of Line Ministries,
Representatives of Pharmaceutical Companies,
Distinguished Invited Guests,
Dear Parents,
Members of the Media,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you all at this important historic event on our health calendar. We invited you to come and bear testimony to the launch of the new Pentavalent vaccine, which will include two new immunizations, namely one against Hepatitis B and one against Haemophilus Influenza B into our routine vaccination schedule for children under one year of age.

In 1990, the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) was launched as an integral part of our Primary Health Care Strategy.

During that time mortality and morbidity was high among children under the age of 5 years due to various vaccine preventable diseases with measles being the number one cause of mortality in children under the age of 15 years.

I am proud to announce that our EPI coverage rapidly increased from 26% in 1990 to above 80 % in 2008. This is indeed a great achievement. Immunization is one of the most successful and cost effective health interventions ever. For example, through immunization the world eradicated Small pox, lowered the global incidence of Polio by 99% and achieved dramatic reduction in illness, disability and death from Diphtheria, Tetanus, Whooping cough and Measles. To date, vaccine preventable diseases are not amongst the top ten diseases in Namibia. However, there remain pockets of un-immunized children still found in some districts.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Following some good practice of routine immunization by developed and some developing countries, including SADC

Member States, the Ministry decided to consult with our Development Partners WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA for Namibia to introduce the new Hepatitis B and Haemophilus Influenza B vaccines into our routine schedule.

In 1991, WHO recommended to Member States that countries with Hepatitis B prevalence or carrier rates of 8% or greater should include routine Hepatitis B immunization in their National Immunization Programmes. As a result, by the end of 2009 all 14 SADC Member States will have incorporated Hepatitis B and Haemophilus Influenza B vaccines into their infant vaccination programme.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by the Hepatitis B Virus (HBV). The disease causes inflammation of the liver cells and can develop into a chronic form, which may cause liver cirrhosis and even liver cancer. Hepatitis B is caused by a virus which occurs in the blood or other body fluids of the infected person for example,

saliva, semen, vaginal fluid and other. Hepatitis B is highly infectious (up to 100 times more infectious than HIV/AIDS). The mode of transmission in the general population is mainly through sexual contact, and any exchange of body fluids or contamination /infection through open wounds exposed to body fluids. Infection of the baby during the birth process is also common when the mother is a carrier.

Namibia is among the most Hepatitis B affected countries in Southern Africa. There are considerable variations in carrier rates in Namibia ranging from 7% in the South to 23% in the Northeast. Childhood infections are particularly serious and are a source of high morbidity. Infection with Haemophilus Influenza Type B manifests itself through severe meningitis and/or Pneumonia especially among children later in life. Haemophilus Influenza B meningitis has a case fatality as high as 50%, and Haemophilus Influenza B Pneumonia has a 34% mortality rate.

Therefore, the Ministry deemed it necessary to introduce the new vaccine, Pentavalent. The vaccine produces a higher immune

response amongst toddlers and children. It also confirms long-term protection and it induces immunity in certain non-vaccinated children who live in close proximity of those who are immunized leading to broad community protection. It will contribute to the reduction of mortality due to vaccine preventable diseases in children and to stop outbreaks.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Pentavalent vaccine has more advantages compared to the former vaccines. For example, the combination vaccines will protect the children against Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Hemophilus Influenza B, and Hepatitis B. Previously, this was only provided in the private sector. In addition, it will now be much easier for the Namibian children to get administered elsewhere on the African Continent while on a visit as the same immunization is being implemented.

Hepatitis B and Haemophilus Influenza B vaccines are very safe and it has decreased the incidence of disease in countries that have introduced it. **It is important to remember that the Pentavalent**

vaccination will be administered at 6, 10 and 14 weeks respectively.

For the safety of children, all injections are given on a “one syringe and one needle per child” basis and the Ministry will introduce autodestruct syringes which is also a new development in the health system.

This new vaccine is a result of deliberate efforts to get ahead of epidemics at a price affordable in Africa. Today we are collectively committing ourselves to put an end to devastating childhood disease outbreaks.

I am glad in our quest to promote good health for the Namibian children, finally we have the Pentavalent vaccine. I commend the joint efforts of my staff members and our development partners. Congratulations for the job well-done!

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is the responsibility of all of us to fulfill our roles in spreading the message and to see that our community is well informed, but

information alone is not enough. People must be educated on how best they can use the information to express themselves and to make informed choices.

These vaccines are very expensive and effective and efficient cold chain management need to be applied. It is expected from all of us to inform our neighbors, friends and families about this new development. Let us encourage parents and guardians to bring their children for routine and follow-up vaccinations. It is our responsibility to build a healthy nation first by immunization of our children.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Parents,

I now have the honor to declare the Pentavalent (Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus, Hepatitis B and Haemophilus Influenza B) into the existing routine immunization launched.

Thank You.