



The Republic of Uganda

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

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## PRESS RELEASE

### CONJUNCTIVITIS (RED EYES) OUTBREAK IN KAMPALA DISTRICT AND PRISON FACILITIES

**Kampala – 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024** – The Ministry of Health would like to inform the public of an ongoing outbreak of conjunctivitis, commonly known as red eyes, in Kampala District and prison facilities. This outbreak has been identified in several schools in the capital city and eight (8) prison facilities in the country. The affected divisions within Kampala district are Nakawa and Rubaga. The affected prisons include Luzira Upper Prison, Murchison Bay Prison, Kasanda Prison, Kaweeri Prison, Lira Main Prison, Erute Prison, Pader Prison, and Kampala Remand Prison.

As per surveillance and laboratory reports, some suspected cases have been reported within the schools. Samples from suspected individuals have been collected for bacterial and viral laboratory testing within Uganda. As of 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024, a total of 954 cumulative cases were registered, with an incidence of 353. Joint surveillance efforts between the Kampala City Council Authority and Ministry of Health teams are actively underway.

So far, a total of 790 cases cumulatively have been diagnosed in the affected prison facilities, of which 711 have been declared as recovered giving a recovery rate of 90%. The incident cases are mainly admitted as new inmates by police who initiate the cascade of in-custody transmission.

Conjunctivitis, characterized by inflammation of the conjunctiva, the mucous membrane that covers the white part of the eyeball and lines the eyelids, can be caused by various factors including viral infections, seasonal allergies, bacterial infections, and reactions to eye medications.

Viral conjunctivitis, the most common form, is highly contagious and can spread from person to person through direct contact, sharing of personal items such as towels or pillowcases, facial contact, or sharing of eye drops or eyeglasses. Symptoms may include redness in the white of the eye or inner eyelid, increased tears, thick yellow discharge over the eyelashes, itching, blurred vision, and sensitivity to light. The contagious period lies within the first 10-12 days; infection can last up to 3 weeks.

In order to control the spread of the disease, the Ministry of Health, with support from partners, has initiated several measures including promoting personal hygiene and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) activities in affected schools, strengthening surveillance in Kampala District, managing and treating affected individuals, sensitizing the public about the disease and prevention measures, and orienting health workers on investigating and responding to cases of red eye disease.

The Ministry of Health urges the public to adhere to the following preventive measures:

- Maintain high sanitation standards
- Wash hands frequently with clean water and soap
- Avoid direct contact with infected individuals, particularly touching the eyes and shaking hands
- Refrain from sharing items with infected persons, such as pillows, washcloths, towels, eye drops, or eyeglasses

The public is encouraged to remain vigilant and report all suspected cases to the nearest health facilities or call the Ministry of Health toll line on 0800-100-066.



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**FOR: DIRECTOR GENERAL HEALTH SERVICES**

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