

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS VACCINE

BY

THE HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR CHILUFYA, MP

Mr Speaker, thank you for granting me this opportunity to present a statement on the nationwide introduction of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine into the national and routine immunization programme.

Sir, I wish to inform the House that the Government of the Republic of Zambia in its relentless pursuit of universal health coverage has introduced the HPV vaccine to the routine immunization programme. The vaccine provides immunity against HPV, which is a sexually transmitted virus and a leading cause of cervical cancer worldwide. The HPV is responsible for causing 90 per cent of all cervical cancers. It is a common virus that can infect both men and women. Fortunately, there are vaccines that can prevent the transmission of HPV.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the introduction of the HPV vaccine in all countries where cervical cancer and other HPV related disorders constitute a public health challenge and Zambia is such a country. Zambia has one of the highest incidences of cervical cancers in the world and according the latest WHO Cancer Report, Globocan, 2018, about 3,000 new cases of cervical cancer are seen every year in Zambia.

Mr Speaker, over 1,800 women die from cervical cancer every year and according to the Zambia National Cancer Registry, cervical cancer accounts for 24.8 per cent of all new cancer cases in the adult population registered annually in the country. Cervical cancer is one of the most preventable and treatable forms of cancer. It, however, requires a comprehensive national strategy, which includes HPV vaccination, screening and treatment of precancerous lesions, as well as effective management of invasive cancer that are spread to other parts of the body such as beyond the cervix.

Sir, Zambia currently has a robust national cervical cancer control programme which is premised on screening for early detection and treatment for precancerous lesions and an ultramodern cancer treatment centre at the University Teaching Hospital (UTH). Until now, we had no national HPV vaccination programme needed to reinforce the comprehensive cervical cancer control programme. In light of the significant epidemiology burden of cervical cancer, the 2017-2021 Nation Cancer Control Strategic Plan (NCCSP) proposed introduction of the HPV vaccine as one of the central pillars for both prevention and control of cervical diseases.

Mr Speaker, the Government of Zambia with consensus of public and private partners has introduced the Gardasil HPV vaccine, a quadrivalent vaccine made by Merck Pharmaceutical Company. The efficacy of the HPV vaccine has been demonstrated worldwide to reduce disease caused by HPV and the spread of HPV among adolescent girls is expected to reduce the future burden of cervical cancer significantly. The vaccine is licensed for use among those aged between nine and twenty-six years old because it is recommended that the vaccine be administered before exposure to HPV.

The target age group for the introduction in Zambia is all girls aged fourteen years and we expect to vaccinate 331,000 fourteen year old girls. We hope to target the girls before they become sexually active.

Mr Speaker, in order to protect our young girls and to secure the future of Zambia, the Government has introduced the HPV vaccine starting 24th June, 2019, in the current child health week campaign. The introduction targets girls aged fourteen years that are school going as well as those that are in the communities and will be done during this child health week first round for 2019. It will also be done at health facilities and designated outreach points.

Sir, the Government has given cervical cancer prevention the attention it deserves considering that young girls are the future mothers of this nation. Protecting them from the deadly disease is the surest way to secure the future of the country. The Ministry of Health is working in collaboration with other line ministries such as the Ministry of General Education, Ministry of

Chiefs and Traditional Affairs, Ministry of Community Development and Social Welfare and Ministry of Higher Education to ensure that this programme is successfully carried out.

The ministry is also supported by the civil society, WHO, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and other members of the UN family, John Hopkins Program for International Education in Gynecological and Obstetrics (JPHIEGO), Churches Health Association of Zambia (CHAZ) and Centre for Infectious Disease Control in Zambia (CIDCZ).

Mr Speaker, I wish to inform the House that the launch of the vaccine was successfully done on Monday, 24th June, 2019. To my fellow hon. Members of Parliament, my appeal is that we help in sensitizing the residents in our respective constituencies to understand that the vaccine is safe and effective.

Finally, I would like to assure the nation that the Government, under the stewardship of His Excellency, Mr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, is committed to ensuring that every girl is protected from cervical cancer and realises full potential and becomes a future mother of the country and also securing the future of the nation. This is part of the broader agenda to strengthen our health systems in pursuit of universal health coverage anchored on a strong primary healthcare programme.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.