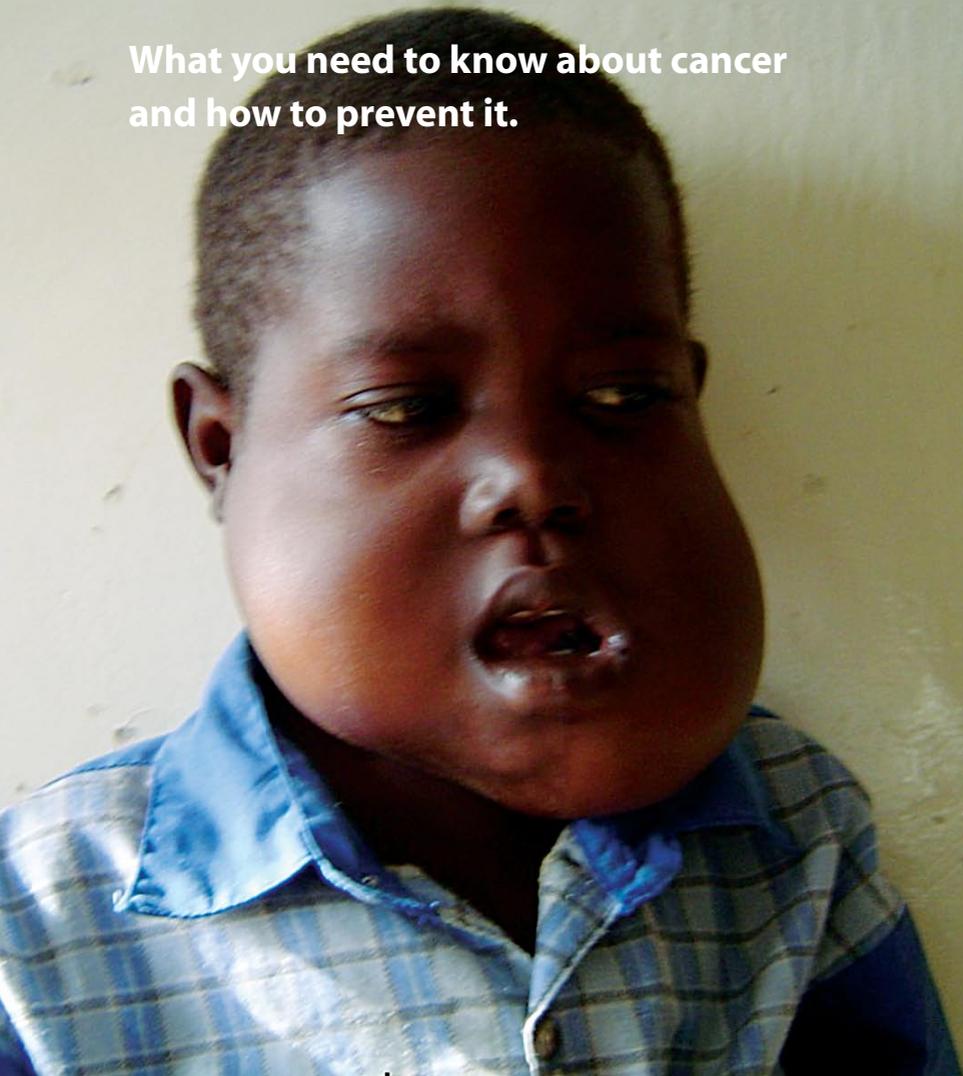




THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA
Ministry of Health

Facts About Cancer in Uganda

What you need to know about cancer
and how to prevent it.



Introduction

Cancer is a growing health problem in Uganda. Cancer affects any part of the body. There are different types of cancers due to different risk factors. Cancer can affect anybody, but this is influenced by one's behaviour, and/or exposure to risky conditions/environment. Although cancer is a serious health problem leading to suffering and death it can be prevented and controlled if detected early. This booklet provides you with useful information to help you protect yourself.

What is Cancer?

Cancer is a chronic disease in which body cells grow abnormally (proliferate) and spread out of control to other parts of body. Cancer is also referred to as a swelling (tumor) or new growth (neoplasm). It begins in your cells, which are the building blocks of your body.

Most cancers are named for where they start. For example, lung cancer starts in the lung, and breast cancer starts in the breast.

What causes Cancer?

The causes of cancer are not known but there are risk factors that contribute to the abnormal and uncontrolled growth of body cells. These cells later spread to other parts of the body if not detected and treated early.

The common causes of cancer referred to as risk factors are;

1. Factors within the body (Intrinsic factors). These include acquiring it from the family lines (heredity), hormones and diet.
2. Factors outside the body (Extrinsic factors). These are exposure to chemicals (e.g. tobacco smoking), radiation, viruses and bacteria.

What are the common types of cancers in Uganda?

The common cancers in Uganda are Cervical Cancer, Prostate cancer, Breast Cancer, Kaposi sarcoma, Burkitt's lymphoma, lung cancer, skin cancer, Cancer of the bone, cancer of the eye, Cancer of the colon, and cancer of the blood.

What are the signs and symptoms of Cancer?

Different cancers present differently. It is advisable to consult a health worker for all illnesses because even what appears to be a common illness may be cancer. Commonly however, cancer can present as a swelling or a mass in any part of the body, unusual loss of blood from the body, body pains or aches, body weakness, unusual fevers and weight loss. In most cases, presentation depends on the system or organ affected by the cancer.

For example cancer of the gullet will present with swallowing problem, cancer of the stomach will present with heart burn, cancer of the lung will

present with cough and difficulty in breathing. The commonest general presentations are recurrent fevers, weight loss and fatigue. In most cases these symptoms are recurrent and not responsive to the usual treatment you are used to for these symptoms.

This usually causes delay in making diagnosis since most people first treat themselves and after failing then they see a doctor. For any symptom therefore the health worker must be seen immediately and the possibility of cancer must be considered at all times and investigation to determine if it is a cancer or not should be done and there should be no delay advising the patient accordingly.

How is cancer treated?

Cancer treatment can be done in different forms depending on the stages of the disease. This can be through operation (surgery), treatment (chemotherapy) with medicines, or radiation and supportive care (palliative)— or sometimes a combination of these treatments. The choice of treatment depends on:

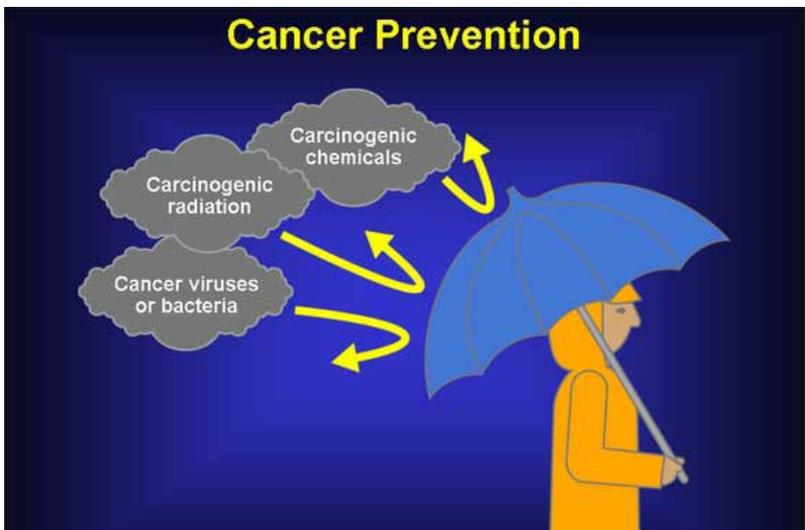
- the type of cancer someone has (the kind of abnormal cells causing the cancer)
- the stage of the tumor (meaning how much the cancer has spread within the body, if at all)

How can cancer be prevented?

The first step in cancer prevention is identification of risk factors and reduce exposure to these factors through behavior change or instituting preventive measures;

- **Behaviors/lifestyle.** These could be tobacco smoking, excessive alcohol taking, poor/non regulated feeding habits.
- **Exposure to chemicals (carcinogens).** This can be in work places where the workers are not protected against exposure to harmful industrial chemicals and their byproducts and radiation.
- **Exposure to germs (viruses and bacteria.)** These can cause infection which might develop into cancer. E.g.: malaria which may lead to Burkitts lymphoma(to include illustration of the risk factors)

The picture illustrating how you can protect yourself against cancer:



Points to remember.

- Cancer is a long term and a complex disease.
- Knowledge of the risk factors (e.g. smoking, unregulated eating habits, exposure to radiation and chemicals) are key to prevention efforts
- Prevention strategies can be applied at individual, family and community level:
 - Avoid tobacco smoking
 - Eat little fats and calories
 - Get young girls who have not had sex before, vaccinated against the virus that causes cancer of the cervix
 - Use protective ware in risky work places such as factories and industries.

In case you detect or feel any abnormal growth and swelling in any part of your body, this could be a sign of cancer, consult the nearest qualified health worker for advice and proper management.

If you detect any abnormal swelling and growth on any part of your body seek attention from the nearest health unit



