

PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday June 30 2009



SNAP SURVEY REVEALS MEDICINE STOCKOUTS STILL PLAGUE KENYA

A spot check at public health facilities in Kenya has revealed that serious stock-outs of essential medicines are still occurring in several districts across the country. A grouping of civil society organizations in Kenya working to STOP stock-outs of essential medicines conducted the spot checks from a week, from Monday 22 to Friday 26 June 2009.

“The results of the survey are shocking, and fly in the face of assurances from health officials, that essential medicines are readily available at public facilities,” said Emma Wanyonyi of the Consumer Information Network, which is leading the Stop Stock-outs campaign in Kenya. “We know the government has started to address the situation, but clearly, more needs to be done. More than 1 million Kenyans are at risk of dying because so many essential medicines are out of stock.”

During the ‘pill check week’, researchers visited public health institutions countrywide and checked on the availability of a list of 10 essential medicines. These are medicines, that, according to the (WHO) *“satisfy the needs of the majority of the population and therefore should be **available at all times**, in adequate amounts, in appropriate dosage forms and at a price the individual and community can afford”* Such medicines should therefore be readily available in public health facilities.

Using innovative technology, the team then reported the results through short messaging services (SMS) to a common site, and the data has been reflected visually in an online mapping of the country that shows areas where medication is out of stock.

The survey checked on the following medicines:

- First-line antimalarials (AMs)
- Zinc 20mg tablet
- Benzathine penicillin
- First line ARVs
- Metronidazole 200mg tablet
- Ciprofloxacin 250 or 500mg tablet
- Amoxicillin suspension
- Ceftriaxone 250mg or 1g vial
- Cotrimoxazole suspension

- ORS - Diarrhea

The survey found that there is an essential medicines crisis looming in Kenya. A major stock-out of essential medicines has been established in the over 100 Government hospitals and clinics surveyed across the country.

Health Action International Africa (HAI Africa) Regional Coordinator Patrick Mubangizi said the essential medicine lacking in public health facilities in the country is used to treat common illnesses such as diarrhoea, malaria, pneumonia, diabetes, hypertension and STDs which by no means should be available in public health facilities.

The HAI Africa Regional Coordinator was confident that the findings of the survey conducted translate to national crises of medicines in the country. "More than one million Kenyans are at risk of dying because so many essentials medicines are out of stock" he emphasised.

Mubangizi blamed the shortage of the essential drugs on bureaucracy at the Kenya Medicine Supply Agency (KEMSA) which he said fostered challenges in the chain of supply. He also suggested autonomy for KEMSA to fasten tendering, procurement and supply of essential drugs in the country.

"The causes of stock-outs are similar in many developing countries. The central medical agencies are not given the required autonomy to supply the medicines at the right time, because of vested interest and bureaucracy," he said. In this year's budget the Health sector was allocated 5 percent of the total budget. Mr Mubangizi said it was important for the government to fund itself and stop over relying on donor funding.

The Stop Stock-Outs activists made an appeal to the government to assess the situation and adhere to the WHO requirement and respect their commitment in the Abuja Declaration to allocate at least 15 percent of the country's budget to health.

Kenya Treatment Access Movement Coordinator James Kamau said the most commonly used pain killer (morphine) was too expensive due to the tax imposed on the drug by the Kenya Revenue Authority. Morphine is commonly used by cancer and HIV/AIDS patients as a pain reliever.

Mr Kamau pointed out that Kenya had grossly violated the WHO requirement since the top 10 most essential drugs remained unavailable let alone the more than 300 in the essential medicine list of Kenya.

The Stop the stock-outs campaign is calling on the Kenyan government to meet their obligations to provide essential medicines to all their citizens. This can be done by:

- ❖ Increasing the national budgetary allocation for the purchase of these medicines
- ❖ Ensuring efficiency and transparency in the procurement, supply, and distribution of medicines by KEMSA among other interventions.
- ❖ Allowing representation of civil society on the board of KEMSA
- ❖ Providing free essential medicines at all public health institutions

Emma Wanyonyi of Consumer Information Network which is leading the “Stop Stock-outs campaign in Kenya commended the efforts the government has put in by allocating some funds in this year’s budget 2009 – 2010 that will go a long way to forestall the stock-outs situation. “We acknowledge the various steps taken by the Ministries of Public Health and Sanitation (MOPS) and Medical Services (MOMS) to reform the Kenya Medical Supply Agency (KEMSA) into an efficient organization to procure and supply essential medicines and supplies for all public health facilities in the country” she said.

She however observed that these reforms have taken a slow pace and the country continues witnessing low availability of medicines in government health facilities. “This situation has forced patients to either go without treatment, or end up buying medicines in the private sector which is unaffordable to the majority of Kenyans. Given the economic hardships Kenyan people are experiencing, we fear that many more Kenyans will suffer if urgent and concerted action is not taken” she quipped.

Kenya Hospices and Palliative Care Association Programme Officer David Musyoki said the Stop Stock-Outs campaign uses Short Messaging Service (SMS) service to collect information from clients visiting public health centers.

He said patients who visit public health facilities and are unable to find medicine should text the location and the drug that is out of stock to a service number 0713226039. He encouraged members of the public to continue forwarding such information in order to put more pressure on the government to avail essential medicines in all public health centers.

The results of the spot check are available for the public to view, on the campaign website, at <http://www.stopstockouts.org>.

For more details contact: Emma Wanyonyi, CIN emma@consumerupdate.org (cell: 0723942347) or Redemtor Atieno, HAI Africa redemtor@haiafrica.org (cell: 0735478305)