



For Immediate Release: March 31, 2010

Contacts:

Paul Quirk

+1-202-549-5394

Paul.Quirk@gmmb.com

Emily Kaiga

+254 722 726 755

Emily.Kaiga@Tell-Em-pr.com

**New Policy Unveiled to Combat Diarrhoeal Disease,
a Leading Killer of Kenyan Children
Public Awareness about Diarrhoea Risk Important to Efforts**

Government of Kenya's Ministry of Health and Sanitation reinvigorates national response to diarrhoeal disease; new health tools available country-wide

(Nairobi, Kenya) Today the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, together with the Department of Family Health (Division of Child and Adolescent Health), unveiled a renewed set of national policy guidelines to redouble diarrhoeal disease management and control efforts by putting proven interventions to work within the country's health system. This announcement comes at a time when global progress against diarrhoea has stalled. Contrary to what many Kenyans believe, diarrhoea is dangerous and not a normal part of childhood development. When left untreated, diarrhoea kills—and is the third-leading cause of death of children under five years old in Kenya.

“Kenya has reduced diarrhoea-related deaths before, but recent data indicates that we have work to do to improve the use of basic treatments like oral rehydration therapy,” offered Beth Mugo, MP, Minister for Public Health and Sanitation. “While many Kenyans have gained access to safe drinking water, the majority still lack access to proper sanitation. This updated policy to combat diarrhoeal disease builds on our achievements and lessons learned during the implementation of the previous policy formulated in the 1990s.”

As part of its new diarrhoeal disease control policy, the government, through the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation and with help from partners including the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), PATH, Population Services International (PSI), and Micronutrient Initiative, will distribute a new chart with the latest diarrhoeal disease control information to all health workers throughout the country this year. This chart will help health workers educate caregivers on how to care for their children at home and when to bring them into the clinic for additional treatment.





“Diarrhoea can be treated in the home with over-the-counter oral rehydration solution and zinc supplementation,” noted Dr. Olivia Yambi of UNICEF. “Together, thousands of lives can be saved with a coordinated approach that involves already proven prevention and treatment methods.”

Diarrhoea can have long-term impacts on children’s health. Persistent diarrhoea can lead to malnutrition, a factor contributing to stunted growth. Research has consistently shown that malnourishment and regular illness during a child’s first few years of life undermines future cognitive development, education, and productivity.

“The good news is diarrhoea-related deaths can be stopped,” encouraged Dr. David Okello of WHO. “Kenya’s new Diarrhoeal Disease Control policy puts the knowledge and proven solutions to treat and prevent many of the lethal causes of diarrhoea into an actionable plan.”

The policy reinforces the comprehensive prevention and treatment recommendations for diarrhoeal disease already outlined by WHO and UNICEF, including zinc supplementation and the use of oral rehydration solution (ORS) to prevent dehydration. Disease prevention can be achieved through exclusive breastfeeding, vitamin A supplementation, proper hygiene techniques like hand washing with soap, and access to improved water supplies.

“This new policy, which complements the Government of Kenya’s Child Survival Strategy, demonstrates our commitment to bringing all of the tools available to prevent child deaths from diarrhoea to bear,” said Dr. Annah Wamae, Head of the Department of Child Health at the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation. “By working with partners to scale up traditional interventions, including ORS and breastfeeding and new interventions such as zinc—and looking forward to solutions like rotavirus vaccines on the horizon—we can make a difference for all the children of Kenya.”

Vaccination is the only preventive method for diarrhoeal disease cases caused by rotavirus, the most severe form of diarrhoea. In Kenya, rotavirus causes more than 7,500 deaths each year. Recent compelling data on the disease burden of rotavirus and power of vaccines to prevent it in low-resource settings informed the WHO’s June 2009 recommendation that rotavirus vaccine be included in every nation’s immunization program.

“The government has developed a smart plan for action to bring available knowledge and solutions to stop diarrhoea to the people who need them,” noted Dr. Ambrose Misore of





PATH. “By working with partners to deploy multiple solutions, thousands of children’s lives will be saved.”

A complete copy of Kenya’s new policy guidelines on the control and management of diarrhoeal disease can be viewed at <http://www.path.org/news/pr100330-diarrhea-policy.php>. For more information on the Government of Kenya’s Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation, visit www.publichealth.go.ke.

###

The Government of Kenya, through the Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation and the Department of Family Health (Division of Child and Adolescent Health), worked with partners, including WHO (who.int/en), UNICEF (unicef.org), PATH (path.org), PSI (psi.org), and Micronutrient Initiative (micronutrient.org) to develop the country’s new policy guidelines on the control and management of diarrhoeal disease. To learn more about the government’s efforts to prevent deaths due to diarrhoeal disease, visit www.publichealth.go.ke.

