

State to spend Sh70m to deworm children

BY JACKSON OKOTH

Prime Minister Raila Odinga has announced the launch of a country-wide school-based deworming programme.

On the sidelines of the 2009 World Economic Forum in Davos Switzerland, Raila said that the government

will invest Sh70 million in the programme, which targets 3 million children in the most high-risk areas of the country.

The Prime Minister spoke at an event hosted by the organisation Deworm the world, which highlighted the important role undertaken by Kenya in tackling the problem of par-

asitic worms. The country is scaling up this school-based deworming programme due to its immense benefits to health and education of children.

POOR CONCENTRATION

Parasitic worms limit nutrient absorption and cause internal bleed-

ing, leading to anaemia and malnutrition. As a result, children are either too sick or too tired to concentrate in class or attend school.

Treating children for parasitic worms is safe, simple and effective. Treatment is needed only once or twice a year at a cost of Sh20 per child.

"We are excited about launch of this deworming programme in primary schools. This will lead to reduced absenteeism and better participation in education," said Margaret Ndanyi, Head of School Health and Nutrition, Ministry of Education.

It is estimated that upto four hundred million school-age children are infected with parasitic worms worldwide, which both damage their health and limit their access to education. This problem has a simple and inexpensive solution.

HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends mass deworming programmes based in schools. This is because it costs just pennies per child. Studies prove it's the most cost-effective way of increasing education.

Deworm the World is working to implement school-based deworming wherever it is needed worldwide.

Hundreds of millions of children worldwide are infected with parasitic worms. These worms are detrimental to children's health, their cognitive development, their education and a brighter future.

Chronic illness caused by worm infections reduces literacy and thus adult productivity thereby impacting on the economic development of low and middle-income countries.

The solution of parasitic worms is thus known. The low cost and efficacy of anthelmintic drugs, especially when delivered through schools, makes deworming a "best buy" for public health interventions leading to improved educational achievement, health status, physical growth and cognitive development among

WHY SCHOOL BASED DEWORMING?

More than 400 million school aged children worldwide are infected with worms.

They negatively affect children's health, nutrition and cognitive development, threatening their learning, education access and achievement.

WHO has a target of deworming 75 per cent of at risk children by 2010.

It can reduce school absenteeism by as much as 25 per cent.

It is estimated that worm infections are responsible for an average loss of four IQs per child.

Worm infected children scored 0.25SD lower on reasoning tasks than children who were dewormed or uninfected.

Children persistently infected with worms were 13 per cent less likely to be literate.

school-age children. In many areas of the world, health infrastructure is under-developed. Health facilities may be few and far between, requiring patients to travel long distances. All too often clinics in rural areas are closed because health professionals are absent or the fees that are charged make health services inaccessible to the poor.

While efforts are targeted towards improving these health systems, until there are accessible clinics it is important to explore alternative mechanisms of delivery.

Schools provide a natural centre for large scale child health interventions, and teachers can treat children when administration of the drugs is simple enough to require only minimal training.

Worms are a problem throughout low and middle-income countries—in sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia, and some parts of Latin America and the Caribbean.