

# MINISTRY OF HEALTH

## Uganda on the Road to Elimination of River Blindness/Onchocerciasis

***For the third time, the Uganda Ministry of Health declares elimination of river blindness transmission in parts of the country.***

Uganda has successfully freed 1,157,303 people from river blindness (onchocerciasis) globally based on the current World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, bringing the country closer to achieving its goal of eliminating river blindness nationwide by 2020. At its peak, the vector-transmitted parasitic worm caused eye and skin disease in 37 districts in Uganda, with about 6.7 million people at risk.

The Tenth Uganda Onchocerciasis Elimination Expert Advisory Committee (UOEEAC) to the Ministry of Health that met from 8th to 10th August 2017, concluded that two more river blindness transmission zones (foci), Kashoya-Kitomi (Ibanda, Kamwengye, Rubirizi and Buhweju districts) and Wambabya-Rwamarongo (Hoima district), have met the WHO criteria for elimination. These two now join the following five foci in reaching elimination status; Victoria (Kamuli, Buikwe, Kayunga, Jinja, Mayuge and Mukono districts), that achieved elimination in the early 1970s; Mpamba-Nkusi (Kagadi formerly Kibaale district); Mt. Elgon (Bududa, Manafwa, Mbale and Sironko districts); Itwara (Kabarole and Kyenjojo districts) and Imaramagambo (Bushenyi and Mitooma districts). An estimated 3,783,847 Ugandans living in these districts are no longer at risk of acquiring the river blindness disease. In total, river blindness in seven out of 17 foci has been eliminated.

The Committee has also recommended that the Wadelai focus (Pakwach district, formerly part of Nebbi district), and West Nile focus (Koboko and Yumbe districts) be moved to Post Treatment Surveillance (PTS) period, as Lymphatic Filariasis (LF) treatments with Ivermectin have been stopped. It was also recommended that the West Nile focus (Yumbe and Koboko districts), be moved to the transmission interruption category where the PTS period will commence now that Ivermectin distribution for LF has been completed.

This implies that Wadelai now joins the Obongi (Moyo District), Nyamugasani (Kasese District) and Maracha-Terego (Maracha and Terego districts) foci, where transmission interruption was declared. However, Maracha-Terego cannot be moved to PTS period as LF treatment is still ongoing.

The Bwindi focus (Rubanda formerly part of Kabale district, Kanungu and Kisoro districts); Budongo focus (Buliisa, Hoima and Masindi districts) and Nyagak-Bondo focus (Nebbi, Zombo and Arua districts), remain under the suspected transmission interruption category, due to the potential for cross border transmission with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

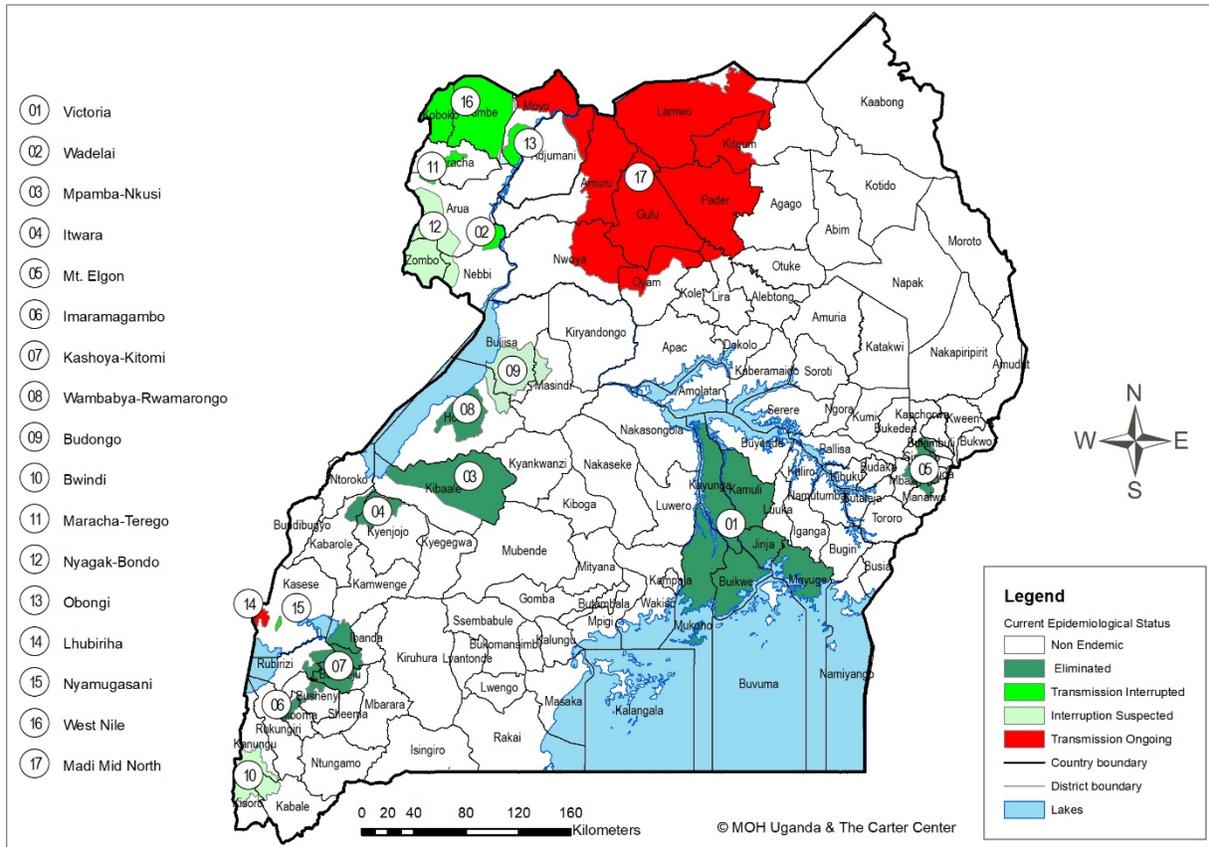
Transmission of River Blindness continues in two of Uganda's original 17 foci: the large Madi-Mid North focus (Pader, Lamwo, Kitgum, Gulu, Omoro, Amuru, Nwoya, Oyam, Lira, Adjumani, and Moyo districts), with a population of 1,437,565; and the smaller Lhubiriha focus in Kasese district, with a population of 135,046. The Madi-Mid North focus shares a border with the Republic of South Sudan (RSS). The Lhubiriha focus is on the DRC border.

The governments of Uganda, in cooperation with sister neighboring countries, DRC and RSS have continued to promote cross border activities. In fact, the governments of DRC and RSS have agreed to work to develop a flexible approach towards onchocerciasis elimination that includes vector control.

Uganda's success has been made possible through the effort of the Ministry of Health's River Blindness Elimination Program, with the support of partners including; The Carter Center, World Health Organization/African Program for Onchocerciasis Control, GTZ, Sightsavers, the Lions Clubs International Foundation and the Lions of Uganda, Merck, the Mectizan Donation Program, BASF, USAID's ENVISION Project led by RTI International and the governments of Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of South Sudan. Uganda's accomplishment is evidence that total elimination of River Blindness is possible in Africa.

Dr. Diana Atwiine  
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**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

**Uganda: Location and status of Onchocerciasis foci**



- 01 Victoria
- 02 Wadelai
- 03 Mpamba-Nkusi
- 04 Itwara
- 05 Mt. Elgon
- 06 Imaramagambo
- 07 Kashoya-Kitomi
- 08 Wambabya-Rwamarongo
- 09 Budongo
- 10 Bwindi
- 11 Maracha-Terego
- 12 Nyagak-Bondo
- 13 Obongi
- 14 Lhubirha
- 15 Nyamugasani
- 16 West Nile
- 17 Madi Mid North