

The Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC) says some bacteria in the human body have become resistant to treatment, making commonly used medicines ineffective.

The issue was discussed Nov. 21 during a consultative meeting that brought together pediatricians and other health professionals to address the rising threat of drug-resistant bacteria.

Research led by Murray in 2019 found that drug-resistant bacteria in Rwanda may have killed about 9,800 people. A global study in 2022 reported that such bacteria were responsible for 5 million deaths worldwide.

Dr. Isabelle Mukagatare, Head of Department of Biomedical Services at RBC said the improper use of antibiotics has contributed to resistance, forcing the use of more expensive, higher-level drugs that are harder to access.

“There are standard medications that treat infections, and they are categorized depending on disease severity,” she said. “Improper use of antibiotics has allowed bacteria to develop resistance, making first- and second-line treatments ineffective.”

Mukagatare added that self-medication, failing to follow prescriptions, and not completing treatment courses allow bacteria to evolve, making them harder to treat.

“When medication is taken exactly as prescribed and for the full recommended period, it ensures that bacteria are effectively killed,” she said.

RBC has responded by educating the public on proper medication use, improving hygiene, training pharmacists and doctors, and strengthening laboratories to detect and identify resistant bacteria.

Professor Lisine Tuyisenge, president of the Rwanda Pediatric Association, said children are particularly vulnerable. Misuse of antibiotics in children can lead to bacterial resistance and even death.

Respiratory infections are common among children, and antibiotics are often prescribed. Tuyisenge said some parents opt for informal treatments, which can worsen infections.

“When children are not properly treated, the medicine doesn’t work, and the

infection can persist, sometimes resulting in death,” she said.

Tuyisenge emphasized that pharmacies do not treat patients. They only dispense medicines prescribed by qualified doctors.

Globally, researchers are working to develop alternative treatments and improve training to better test and treat drug-resistant bacteria.