



Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority

School health integrated programs in Western Highlands Province

The Health Promotion Team of the Western Highlands Provincial Health Authority (WHPHA) has made significant strides in monitoring the health and well-being of school children through the school health integrated programs carried out in both elementary and primary schools in the province.

This initiative positions Western Highlands as the first province in the country to implement this integrated program, which includes:

- wellness checks
- school environmental assessments
- nutrition interventions (including deworming and iron supplementation)
- nutrition education
- physical health examinations for students
- distribution of information and educational materials, such as posters and pamphlets and
- general health promotion activities

According to WHPHA's Provincial Nutrition Officer, Mary Rex, the program is primarily funded by UNICEF and the National Department of Health and was effective two years ago and is ongoing.

“We have partnered with the Western Highlands Department of Education, and this year we have reached more than 15,000 students,” said Ms. Rex. She noted that there have been no challenges in reaching schools, as students and teachers have been cooperative and welcoming, thanks to a Memorandum of Understanding established between the Department of Health and the Department of Education.

Since the inception of the program, they have identified students with various health issues, including toothaches and hearing and visual impairments, and referred them to hospitals for further care. Before the nutrition interventions, many students struggled with health problems that hindered their ability to focus in class; however, following the program, they began attending classes regularly and showing improved academic performance, as reported by their teachers.

The program has also educated sellers to avoid selling junk food and sweets in schools, highlighting the negative impact these items have on students' health. Instead, they encourage the sale of healthier garden foods in schools to promote better living. In addition, mothers in the village are now being taught which foods to bring to market and which ones can be preserved for their children to ensure they consume nutritious meals.

Despite these efforts, the program faces few challenges in urban schools, particularly with nearby vendors who continue to sell junk and processed foods, even after advocacy efforts to discourage this practice.

Kuni Hunpio, the District Health Promotion Officer for Hagen Central, expressed his gratitude to UNICEF for providing the resources needed to implement the program in schools. He hopes that these initiatives will be expanded to other schools in the province that have not yet adopted the program, noting that this will depend on their donor partners. **Ends//**

Picture Captions:





1&2. School students receiving deworming tablets to remove parasitic worms from the body



3. School-aged students, aged 10-19 years old, were given iron supplements to help reduce anemia and promote healthy growth and development.



4. Tetanus toxoid (TT) vaccinations for School Entry (Gr. 3) and School Exit (Gr. 8)