Policy Briefing:

The Delta Variant: Risks for Cameroon and the Case for Vaccination

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Overview:

This policy briefing synthesises key insights from the Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals meeting held on August 14, 2021, focusing on the theme "How Dangerous Is the COVID-19 Delta Variant?", presented by Dr. Obadia Mfuh Kenji.

Context:

By August 2021 Delta had become the dominant variant in many countries and had been detected in Cameroon, where vaccine coverage was very low and hesitancy was common, including among health workers and scientists.

Key Issues:

1. **Faster spread:** Delta is 40 to 60 percent more transmissible than Alpha, with much higher viral loads early in infection.
2. **Possible higher severity:** Early data suggested higher risks of hospitalisation, ICU admission and death.
3. **Breakthrough transmission:** Vaccinated people can be infected and transmit Delta, though they clear the virus faster and rarely become severely ill.
4. **Low vaccine uptake and misinformation:** Rumours (microchips, placebo for ministers, blocked natural immunity) spread faster than scientific messages.
5. **Limited testing:** Low testing and genomic surveillance in Cameroon hide the true number of infections.

Discussion Highlights:

- Vaccines remain highly effective against severe disease and death from Delta.
- Vaccine-related clotting is rare, and COVID-19 carries a far higher clot risk.
- Allergy to sulfa drugs is not known to be a contraindication.
- Cameroon's young population may explain lower mortality, but Africa is not protected.
- Scientists need clearer, more emotionally resonant communication.

Recommendations:

- **Accelerate vaccination:** MINSANTE and the EPI should expand access to all available vaccines, prioritising health workers, older adults and people with diabetes or hypertension, and stress completing two doses where required.
- **Keep barrier measures:** MINSANTE and regional delegations should maintain mask use in crowded indoor settings, hand washing and isolation of cases, including for vaccinated people.
- **Strengthen testing and sequencing:** The national public health laboratory network and partners should expand PCR testing and genomic surveillance to track Delta and new variants.
- **Answer health workers' concerns:** Regional delegations and professional orders should run sessions where specialists answer health workers' questions on clotting, allergies and boosters.
- **Counter misinformation:** MINSANTE, the media and diaspora professionals should use clear, emotionally resonant messages and personal testimonies, in English and French, to answer common rumours.

Next Steps: Recordings of past sessions were being posted on the Town Hall's YouTube channel, website and Facebook page.

Conclusion: Delta is more dangerous than earlier variants, but vaccines still prevent most severe disease and death. For Cameroon the priorities are more vaccination, continued barrier measures, better testing and better communication.

Prepared by the Co-Moderators, Cameroon Townhall for Healthcare Professionals, from the session of August 14, 2021. Recording: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6K7IYWPruLg