

Vaccination deaths haunt govt

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Nine cases in the High Court, in which parents are suing the health ministry for close to N\$5 million after their children died following routine vaccinations, may be grouped together.

The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) confirmed last week that it is handling nine vaccine-related lawsuits, most of which were filed in 2017.

The cases are based on claims of gross negligence by healthcare workers.

The LAC's Corinna van Wyk says they are considering joining some of these cases at the instruction of the presiding judges and a decision is still pending.

Cases have been postponed to this month and September for a status hearing on the issue.

"The deputy judge president and the case management judges requested the parties to cluster together these cases with similar facts and that may use the same experts to see if we can deal with more than one case at a time," she told Namibian Sun.

She said the LAC has provided the High Court with a list of cases that could be heard together and is waiting for the court's feedback.

Tragedy

Martha Shikongo and Denny Mwanyekange are suing the health ministry for N\$718 000 after their son, Paulus Jona Mwanyekange, died in January 2015 when he was less than two months old. The parents claim he died shortly after he had been vaccinated.

"The minor child was gasping for air and passed away soon thereafter. The minor child had white foam and blood coming out of his eyes, nose and ears at the time of death," they state in court papers.

Johanna Julien Mouers filed a N\$546 140 lawsuit after her baby died in July 2016 shortly after a routine vaccination. The child was just over two years old.

As in the other lawsuits related to vaccines, Mouers bases her claim for damages on the health ministry's failure to ensure that the vaccine medication were stored properly and safely.

Moreover, the plaintiffs claim that healthcare staff failed to comply with their duty of care, including providing the relevant information to

Lina Kangala is suing the ministry for N\$742 840 after her baby, born in January 2015, died in November that year following a routine vac

Gross neglect

Bernice Soetmelk and Linus Festus are suing the ministry for N\$545 000, after the death of their daughter Natasha Soetmelk shortly before December 2018, barely a month after she was born.

Angelina Veronika Lasarus is suing the health ministry for N\$535 000 after her baby boy died at the age of two months in May 2016.

Lasarus claimed that after the baby was vaccinated he was crying non-stop but despite voicing her concerns she was sent home. He died

The health ministry is being sued for N\$225 000 by Lynette Rizelda Morkel, whose one-and-a-half-month-old baby died in June 2016 following a routine vaccination.

Another lawsuit was brought by Hilde Namhadi and Frans Nangolo, who are suing the health ministry for N\$545 000 for the death of their son in 2017.

Victoria Kangala is suing the ministry for N\$710 000, after her two-month-old baby died following a vaccination in February 2017.

Loide Imongwa's baby died two months after being born, and she filed a N\$225 000 lawsuit against the government of Namibia and health ministry in 2018.

In 2018, Van Wyk told Namibian Sun that although several cases on the LAC's books are related to vaccines, there are many factors that contribute to vaccine-related deaths.

"It is not the LAC's intention to take these matters on because we are against vaccines. In fact, we advocate for the right to health, but this is not to say that vaccines are not safe for humans, especially for infants who generally have weaker immune systems than older children or adults."

She said what happens before immunisation is a crucial factor.

This includes safe storage and transport of vaccines, their expiry dates and any underlying health conditions infants or children present with at the time of vaccination.

Moreover, she said public awareness is important to empower people to make informed decisions.

JANA-MARI SMITH

