

'Life for a Child'

Jamaican children with Type 1 diabetes are to benefit under an international programme, which is designed to reduce mortality associated with the disease.

Dubbed 'Life for a Child', the initiative, which is funded by the International Diabetes Federation (IDF), will provide insulin, syringes and glucose monitoring devices to centres, which cater to diabetic children. A total of 200 of the 1,300 children across the island, who are affected by the disease, will benefit under the first phase of the programme. It is being organised locally by the Diabetes Association of Jamaica (DAJ). Speaking at the launch held today (March 24), at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel in Kingston, President of the IDF, Professor Jean Claude Mbanya, said it is the right of every child to live a healthy life and this is only possible if they are given the required care and assistance. He stated that in developed countries, children with diabetes have full access to care and can lead healthy and productive lives, lamenting that in developing countries, children sometimes die due to lack of insulin. He noted that in the Republic of Zambia in Southern Africa, for example, many children who are diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes do not survive for more than one year. "This is unacceptable," Mr. Mbanya stated. "We live in a world where the have, have a lot, and the have not are left to die. We must redress this situation," he bemoaned. "We want every child, who has Type 1 diabetes, no matter the race, no matter your socio-economic background, no matter where you live, you should be able to have the best services possible," he said. Under the programme, routine checks will be done to determine the benefits of the programme and that the children are living a better quality of life. Support will also be provided for diabetes education and capacity building, which are critical for survival. "We will be able to not only take care for the children with diabetes but to also make sure that those who come from very poor families will be able to attend school and will be able to live a life beyond the insulin and testing materials," Professor Mbanya said. He challenged the DAJ to manage the programme efficiently, promising that if this is done "every child in Jamaica will benefit from the programme," and assistance will be increased. Executive Director, DAJ, Owen Bernard, said the initiative is an excellent one as focus is normally placed on adults rather than children with diabetes. The IDF is a worldwide alliance of more than 200 diabetes associations in approximately 160 countries, which have come together to enhance the lives of people with diabetes everywhere. More than 3,600 children from 23 developing countries are benefitting under the IDF's 'Life for a Child' programme, which started in 2001. The organisation estimates that by the end of this year, the programme would have reached 5,000 children from 25 countries. "The good news about it is that we have the possibility of including up to 24,000 children because we have the necessary good," Mr. Mbanya said. He is encouraging Jamaicans to support the cause by donating US\$1 through the DAJ. Type 1 diabetes (insulin-dependent or juvenile diabetes) results when the pancreas loses its ability to make the hormone insulin. In the condition, which only occurs in children, the immune system attacks and destroys the cells in the pancreas that produce insulin, which is needed to maintain regular blood sugar levels. Children, who are not treated for the disease, develop recurrent illnesses and complications such as blindness and kidney failure in young adulthood.