



Participants in an awareness drive ahead of World AIDS Day. Oral HIV test kits are easy and painless to use. They have also been approved for use by health authorities

By Ritah Mukasa

For the last two years, Peter Kato, 26, a bodaboda rider in Kampala, has been using OralQuick HIV self-test kits and swears by them.

Kato says the kits are accessible, convenient and easy to use. Previously, Kato had trouble taking an HIV test, saying he did not trust clinics when it came to privacy and accuracy. Besides, big as he is, the pricks freak him out.

Kato tried to use condoms, but they were not sustainable. His girlfriend did not like condoms, yet Kato could not trust her.

"I caught her cheating twice," he says.

Kato was stuck between a rock and a hard place. Fortunately, in 2023, he attended a medical camp organised by Human Diagnostics Uganda Ltd (HDU) in partnership with Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC). He was introduced to the oral HIV self-test kit and calls it a game-changer.

"They showed me how to use it, and I have never looked back since then," he says.

HDU is a leading distributor of medical laboratory diagnostic instruments and is also known for pioneering innovative devices that support the testing and diagnosis of different diseases.

WHAT IS AN ORAL HIV TEST?

While other rapid HIV self-test kits involve pricking, collecting and testing your blood, with the oral HIV self-test kit, you gently swab your upper and lower gums once with the provided swab. Then, you put it into the test tube with a developer solution and wait for 20 minutes. Thereafter, you check the test stick for results.

This self-test kit works by detecting the antibodies in a fluid sample from the gums. No blood or pain is involved.

Most importantly, you perform the test yourself, including

ORAL HIV SELF-TEST: SIMPLE SOLUTION FOR EVERYONE



A man gets tested with an oral HIV test kit during an awareness drive recently

reading and interpreting the results. The kit includes a strip and buffer.

ORAL HIV TEST IS A GAME-CHANGER

The oral HIV self-test is a personal affair; private and simple to use by all. Whether you are old or youthful, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, everybody can use it. The results are accurate, provided you follow the guidelines.

The results are also easy to understand. You do not need a medic to interpret them for you. And for those who can't read, there are illustrations to follow.

Meanwhile, the instructions are in four languages: English, Luganda, Acholi and Runyakitara.

Emmanuel Rubandi, the HDU business development manager, calls the oral test a great way to know your HIV status on your

WHAT TO OBSERVE BEFORE TESTING

- Do not use oral care products (such as mouthwash or toothpaste) 30 minutes before testing
- Do not eat, drink or chew gum for at least 15 minutes before testing
- Remove dental products such as dentures or any other products that cover your gums before testing
- Prepare a private and well-lit area for testing
- Have a timer or watch
- Wash your hands thoroughly before testing
- After the testing and analysis results, discard the kit as domestic waste

own, from the confines of your home, office or private location, such as a hotel.

There is more good news; you get the results within 20 minutes. In other words, you test yourself then sit back and wait for 20 minutes to take or abandon your

next mission.

With the rising HIV rates, especially among young people, Rubandi calls upon Ugandans to embrace this test kit.

To those with concerns about its effectiveness, he says: "The oral HIV test was approved by the

World Health Organisation."

Other certifying bodies, such as the Food and Drug Authority, the National Drug Authority and the Ministry of Health, have approved it. These bodies do not stop at that but have been supporting its use since 2019, when it was introduced in Uganda.

This is why, Rubandi says, these kits are now accessible to all. They are found in private and public health facilities, in pharmacies, supermarkets and online outlets.

They are free of charge at public facilities. However, the prices vary depending on the pharmacy or private facility where you buy them. They range from sh18,000 upwards.

"There is no excuse for not knowing your HIV status," Rubandi says. "If you don't have money, go to a public facility and ask for the free ones."

Privacy is also prioritised. If you are the kind who hesitates to go to a testing facility for fear of stigma, the oral test has you covered.

"Be in charge of your health. HIV is expensive to manage, and donor funding has reduced tremendously," he says.

Also, the pill burden can take a toll.

"First, take a test before you engage in sex."

There are also free kits given to pregnant women to test their children. Others test their husbands.

Over the past six years, HDU has been organising medical camps in taxi parks and marketplaces in partnership with UAC. Many have flocked to the camps to learn about the oral HIV self-test kits, among other things.

Rubandi reminds Ugandans that prevention is better than a cure. And in light of the increasing HIV rates, he says: "Don't test for HIV using your eyes. Only a test kit will give you genuine results."