

Latest 2025 data from the district health department shows that HIV prevalence has increased from 1.5 percent in 2022 to 2.4 percent today.

BY MARKO TAIBOT

Adjumani District is witnessing a worrying rise in HIV infections, particularly among teenagers, a trend leaders warn could undermine years of progress in controlling the virus.

Latest 2025 data from the district health department shows that HIV prevalence has climbed from 1.5 percent in 2022 to 2.4 percent today. This is slightly above the West Nile regional average of 2.3 percent, though still below the national rate of 5.1 percent.

The District Health Officer, Dr Dominic Drametu, said the upward shift is alarming, especially because new infections are increasingly occurring among adolescents.

He said the district currently has 3,300 people living with HIV, and between July 2024 and June alone, 110 new infections were recorded.

"This trend is terrible because teenagers are now among the most affected groups," Dr Drametu said last week.

Why the spike?

Dr Drametu linked the rise in infections to domestic violence, family breakdown, and economic pressure, which he said expose teenagers to risky sexual behaviour.

He emphasised the need for youth-friendly health services, strengthened community awareness, and interventions that address both violence and poverty.

"The situation is worrying, but with coordinated action, we can change the direction. Our teenagers must be protected," he added.

The district secretary for health, Mr John Sabuni, said many families are facing severe economic hardships, pushing young people into unsafe environments.

He also warned that the declining public conversation around HIV is contributing to rising infections.

"We are not doing well. In the past,

Adjumani leaders sound alarm as HIV cases rise among teens



Locals display messages against the HIV scourge during the World Aids Day last week at Adjumani Model Secondary School playground. PHOTO/MARKO TAIBOT.

people feared HIV, but these days we no longer talk about it, and that is why it is affecting our young people. People think the silence means the virus is not active in society," he said.

Persons living with HIV speak out

People living with HIV urged leaders to improve representation and support for their community.

Ms Harriet Maiku, who has lived with HIV since 2002, encouraged people to follow treatment guidelines, stating that one can live a long and healthy life with proper care.

"When I tested and found out I was positive, I accepted my result and started living positively," she said.

Another resident, Mr Maiku Francis, diagnosed in 2003, said he has managed to educate his children despite his

status. He appealed to district leaders to ensure people living with HIV are represented in council by individuals who understand their challenges.

Ms Juliet Tarapkwe, who has lived with the virus for more than 20 years, said strict adherence to treatment has enabled her to care for several children orphaned by HIV, supporting some up to university level.

"This disease cannot kill you if you follow the protocols given by the doctor," she said.

West Nile regional context

The 2022 Uganda Population-Based HIV Impact Assessment places West Nile's HIV prevalence at 2.3 percent.

3,300
PEOPLE WITH HIV IN
ADJUMANI

Arua City leads with 4.4 percent, followed by Zombo (3.5 percent), Nebbi (3.4 percent), and Pakwach (3.3 percent).

Adjumani and Arua District stand at 2.4 percent, Moyo at 2.3 percent, Obongi at 1.8 percent, while Maracha and Yumbe have the lowest rates at 1 percent.

The TB and HIV officer at the Infectious Diseases Institute (IDI), Mr David Emucu, said the government and partners are scaling up interventions across the region. West Nile has 43,700 people living with HIV, of whom 37,200 (85 percent) are on antiretroviral therapy (ART).

In Adjumani, 2,700 of the 3,300 people living with HIV are on treatment, an

84 percent coverage, below the national target of 95 percent.

"We need to pay special attention to children and adolescents. Many of those newly diagnosed fall in these age groups, so we must understand their specific needs," Mr Emucu said.

Local leaders argue that addressing the rising infections will require a joint effort involving local government, cultural institutions, religious leaders, the media, schools, and civil society groups.

Uganda, like many countries, has committed to the global goal of ending HIV as a public health threat by 2030, a target experts say will be impossible to reach unless infections among teenagers are urgently addressed.