

Condom use key in HIV fight – WHO

BY SAMILU BUSEIN

KAMPALA. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has said when used correctly and consistently, condoms offer up to 98 percent protection against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

The Ministry of Health has hailed condom use for reducing the spread of STIs, and HIV/Aids and reducing unwanted pregnancies

Speaking ahead of the commemoration of World Condom Day yesterday, observed on February 13, the Director General of Health Services at the Ministry of Health, Dr Charles Olaro, warned that HIV/Aids remains a deadly threat despite progress in prevention and treatment.

He particularly cautioned young people against risky sexual behaviour, noting that many mothers living with HIV had made sacrifices to prevent mother-to-child transmission, only for adolescents to acquire new infections.

Mr Bonface Epoku, a programme officer in charge of condom programming at the Health ministry, said condom use accounts for 57 percent of prevented new infections.

He added that condom distribution has increased to about 150 million annually, with demand now standing at 200 million.

Officials from Aids Healthcare Foundation (AHF) Uganda Cares, which is leading this year's national commemoration, say the initiative has yielded results.

Mr Haruna Semuwemba, the AHF Uganda Cares prevention manager, said condom advocacy and uptake have improved significantly.

"Between 2018 and 2026 alone, we distributed about 63 million condoms to communities on request," Mr Semuwemba said. "However, there is still a major gap among the youth, many of whom continue to engage in unprotected sex."

He noted that Fort Portal City, which will host this year's celebrations, has registered a high number of new infections, largely among young people.

Dr Francis Engwau, the Programme Analyst for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and HIV at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), echoed the call for intensified youth education.

"Many youth do not use family planning methods that also prevent STIs, some of which can lead to infertility," Dr Engwau said. "In some communities, condoms are still considered a taboo so continued sensitisation is critical," he added.