

Uganda to receive 94,000 HIV prevention doses next week

By Agnes Kyotalengerire

Uganda is set to receive 94,560 doses of the long-acting HIV prevention injectable drug lenacapavir next week in a drive aimed at expanding the country's HIV prevention options.

The twice-yearly injectable drug, already in transit, will be delivered to the Joint Medical Store and National Medical Stores. An official launch, during which the first injection will be administered, is scheduled for March.

Dr Herbert Kadama, the national pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) co-ordinator in the health ministry, said the drug will initially be rolled out in about 300 public and private not-for-profit (faith-based) health facilities across the country.

Of the total consignment, 34,560 doses, enough to benefit 17,280 people, have been procured with financial support from the Global Fund. The US government has donated 60,000 doses, sufficient to cover 30,000 people for one year.

In total, 47,280 people in high-risk populations will receive the drug free of charge. The priority groups include adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24, pregnant and

NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR CONDOMS

Health officials say while Lenacapavir is highly effective in preventing HIV, it does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or unintended pregnancy.

Boniface Epoku, the condom programming co-ordinator in the health ministry, urged continued use of condoms to prevent infections such as gonorrhoea, syphilis, herpes and human papillomavirus.

"People test negative before sex but forget they remain exposed to other infections and pregnancy," Epoku said, adding that condoms remain a "triple protection" tool guarding against HIV, other STIs and unintended pregnancies.

According to the 2022 Uganda Demographic and Health Survey, only 17.6% of people reported using a condom during their last risky sexual encounter.

breastfeeding mothers, female sex workers and their male clients. Other key populations include fishermen, long-distance truck drivers and people in multiple sexual partnerships.

The development comes a day after Kenya received 21,000 doses of lenacapavir for roll-out in 15 counties.

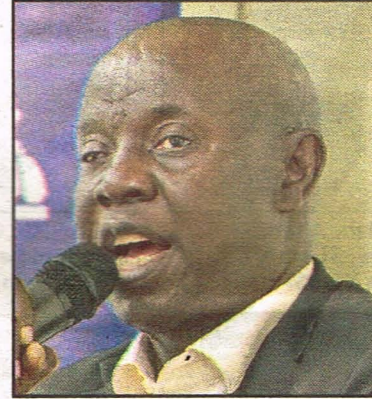
Named the "Breakthrough of the Year" by *Science* magazine in 2024, lenacapavir demonstrated 100% efficacy in reducing HIV infections in early study results.

STUBBORN INFECTION RATES

Uganda continues to grapple with high rates of new HIV infections. In 2024 alone, 37,000 new infections were recorded nationwide.

Young women aged 15-24 remain disproportionately affected, accounting for 78% of infections among adolescents. Four out of every five young people newly infected are girls and young women.

However, the overall HIV prevalence has slightly declined from 5.1% in



National co-ordinator: Kadama

2023 to 4.9% last year. Annual AIDS-related deaths have also dropped significantly, from 54,000 in 2010 to 20,000 in 2024.

Approximately 1.5 million Ugandans are living with HIV, with about 1.3 million currently on antiretroviral therapy.

Earlier this year, the National Drug Authority approved lenacapavir, manufactured by Gilead Sciences, for use as a twice-yearly PrEP option.

Dr Kadama said training of health workers on administering the drug

was ongoing to ensure smooth nationwide implementation.

HOW LENACAPAVIR WORKS

Dr Kadama said lenacapavir, marketed as Yeztugo for prevention, is a first-in-class HIV-1 capsid inhibitor that disrupts the virus at multiple stages of its lifecycle.

In simple terms, the drug interferes with the formation of the virus' protective outer shell, preventing it from replicating effectively.

Administered as a subcutaneous (under-the-skin) injection every six months by a trained health worker, the drug is designed as a long-term prevention option.

"As long as someone remains HIV-negative and at risk, they can continue to receive regular, timely doses," Dr Kadama said.

"While clinical trials have focused on several years of use, lenacapavir is designed to be a long-term prevention tool."

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