

Uganda is among the top ten high-burden countries selected to access the injectable through support from the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief and the Global Fund.

BY SYLVIA NAMAGEMBE

Uganda has received its first consignment of 19,200 doses of Lenacapavir, a long-acting HIV prevention drug administered twice a year, a shot in the arm for the country's decades-long battle against an epidemic affecting more than 1.4 million citizens.

The shipment, supported by the Global Fund, arrived on Monday and will be distributed to high-burden and high-incidence districts as part of efforts to stem the tide of new infections, according to the Ministry of Health.

Lenacapavir, developed by US-based Gilead Sciences, is a twice-yearly injectable drug for individuals at substantial risk of contracting HIV. Clinical trials have shown it to be more than 99 percent effective in preventing infection among high-risk populations.

"The initial consignment of 19,200 doses of Lenacapavir from Global Fund has arrived in Uganda. The drug is administered every six months to prevent HIV among persons at substantial risk of acquiring HIV. They will be distributed to high burden and high incidence districts effective March 2026," the Ministry of Health said in a statement on X on Monday.

The Ministry noted that priority groups include young women, pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and key populations disproportionately affected by HIV, such as sex workers.

Uganda is among the top ten high-burden countries selected to access the injectable through support from the US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund. The introduction of Lenacapavir is part of a broader US-backed initiative to fast-

Over 19,000 doses of HIV prevention drug arrive



The first consignment of Lenacapavir arrived in Uganda on February 24 and will be distributed to high-burden and high-incidence districts.

track HIV prevention in countries hardest hit by the epidemic.

According to 2024 Uganda Aids Commission (UAC) statistics, an estimated 1.5 million people were living with HIV, with approximately 730 new infections recorded weekly.

While oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) remains available, experts said

the twice-yearly injection could help keep adherence on track, especially among young women and vulnerable groups who struggle with daily medication.

UAC General Dr Nelson Musoba said Uganda recorded about 36,000 new HIV infections in 2024 and must cut that figure to fewer than 10,000 annually by 2031 to stay on course to end Aids as a public health threat.

"In 2024, Uganda recorded 36,000 new infections and our target is set at reducing this to less than 10,000 by 2031 where as a country we are implementing a 'three zeros' strategy, zero new HIV infections, zero Aids-related deaths, and zero stigma and discrimination," he said.

Dr Musoba explained that individuals who achieve viral suppression cannot transmit HIV, even if sexually active, and that strict adherence to treatment enables HIV-positive mothers to deliver HIV-negative babies.

"The only way to turn off the tap is to ensure all HIV-positive individuals are on treatment and achieve viral suppression. These people at a certain point their risk of spreading the virus is too low to infect while taking in account other considerations like sticking to only one partner and not mixing other viruses just because you know you are already sick," he added.

The US government and the Global Fund are co-financing an advanced market commitment to make the drug accessible to up to two million people across high-burden countries by 2028.

Dr Hudson Balidawa, a senior official overseeing Global Fund HIV investments, explained that the drug will not only be distributed through public HIV prevention programmes but also made available for purchase in private-sector clinics, allowing those who can afford it to access the medication directly.

"The demand is expected to far exceed initial projections while the gov-

ernment had initially budgeted doses for 17,000 people this year, recent assessments indicated that up to 67,000 individuals could benefit from the injectable drug," he added.

Information from the National Drug Authority (NDA) indicates that before approval, the product undergoes rigorous assessment to ensure it meets "national and internationally accepted quality, safety and efficacy standards." For products manufactured outside Uganda, NDA requires prior approval from the country of origin.

Background

In a statement dated January 5, NDA said approval of Lenacapavir would breathe new life into Uganda's fight against HIV/Aids as the country races against time to end the disease by 2030.

"The NDA has just approved Lanacapavir, a twice yearly dose-PrEP manufactured by Gilead, a USA-based company! This is a game-changer for HIV prevention, especially for those at high risk. This is a great step towards ending Aids by 2030," the notice read.

Dr Robert Mutumba, the head of the Aids Control Programme at the Ministry of Health, noted that Ugandans are expected to start accessing the drug free of charge after two months.

"We got an offer from the Global Fund. Uganda is among 10 countries that will benefit and each person will get two doses and as we look at ways of increasing access through engagement of other development partners," he said.

Dr Mutumba further cautioned that Lenacapavir is not a cure for HIV or Aids, but a preventive medicine administered every six months to reduce the risk of acquiring HIV among HIV-negative individuals at substantial risk.

Recent figures from UAC also show a slight decline in HIV prevalence, from 5.1 percent in 2023 to 4.9 percent in December 2024. Prevalence ranges from 7.5 percent

LENACAPAVIR

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