

HIV PREVALENCE IN PRISONS **DROPPING** – REPORT

PHOTO BY DAVID LUKIIZA

By Agnes Kyotalengerire

There has been a reduction in HIV prevalence among inmates, a new report has revealed.

The National Prisons Tuberculosis and COVID-19 survey of 2024 revealed that the prevalence among inmates (prisoners) dropped from 14% in 2014 (Sero-prevalence HIV survey 2014) to 12% in 2024, which is, however, high compared to the national HIV prevalence of 4.9%.

HIV prevalence refers to the total number of individuals living with the HIV in each population at a specific time, usually expressed as a percentage.

Breaking it down, the prevalence among women stood at 15%, compared to their male counterparts who recorded 11.5%.

The same report shows that the HIV prevalence among the prison staff dropped from 12% in 2014 to 2% in 2024.

One would wonder why there is such a drastic drop in HIV prevalence among the staff and a slight reduction among the inmates.

CONGESTION STILL A CHALLENGE

The assistant commissioner for health at Uganda Prisons Service, Dr James Kisambu, blamed it on the 350% level of congestion within the facilities due to lack of enough space to accommodate everyone.

This, he said, contributes to a high proportion of infections in the prisons compared to the outside community.

Kisambu further said whereas the staff stay within the prison



L-R: Dr Kisambu, Mungati, head of programmes at The AIDS Support Organisation, Dr Yunus Miya and Dr Musoba launch the 2026 Uganda HIV Marathon at Munyonyo Commonwealth Resort on Tuesday. They called for a collective fight against HIV

environment all the time and the administration has total control over them, it is not the case with the prisoners, who frequently come in and go out.

He said the 2% reduction among the staff is a true reflection of what the community has achieved among the population that is hard to reach.

The worrying bit is that data from 2014 found that 65% of the inmates have never taken a single HIV test in their lives.

In this regard, Dr Kisambu said most of the prisoners take an HIV test for the first time because the prison administration has institutionalised measures for

UGANDA'S HIV BURDEN

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 the infections.

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 2023 to 4.9% last year. Annual HIV-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.

everyone who goes in to take an HIV test and know their status.

There are 270 prison facilities across the country. Within a year, there is a turnover of

250,000 people going in and leaving the prisons. At a given time, there are 80,000 people imprisoned across the country.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?
“We are going to use initiatives such as annual marathons to actually get partnerships within the community because that is where the problem is.

He added that the problem is not in the prison but rather in the community. For instance, the inmates come from the community where there are no systems for them to access services and get them when they are admitted to the prison.

He made the remarks when the Uganda AIDS Commission, in partnership with Village Journeys Africa, launched the Uganda HIV Marathon 2026 under the theme, *Run For Hope. Act for Life*, at Munyonyo Commonwealth Resort in Kampala on Tuesday.

The chief executive director of Village Journeys Africa, Maery Mungati, said the marathon will take place in 10 cities across the country that are grappling with high numbers of new HIV infections. Last year, the marathon was held in four cities.

According to the 2025 national HIV estimates report, Fort Portal city leads with a prevalence of 14.3%, up from 14.1% in 2024. This is followed by Soroti city at 11.6% (from 12.5%), Mbarara city at 9.9% (from 11.1%), Gulu city at 9.6% (from 10.5%) and Masaka city

at 9.6% (from 11.3%). Lira city stands at 9.1% (from 12.0%) and Hoima city at 7.7% (from 9.6%).

The director general of the Uganda AIDS Commission, Dr Nelson Musoba, said the launch, therefore, marks the beginning of a national mobilisation process towards a major national AIDS marathon later in the year, which will form part of Uganda's key build-up activities for World AIDS Day.

“This initiative provides a powerful platform to remind ourselves that the HIV response is not the responsibility of the health sector alone, but of every institution, every community, and every individual Ugandan,” Musoba said.

He received a symbolic torch to launch the Uganda AIDS Marathon 2026, which will culminate in the national marathon on November 29.

PROGRESS MADE

Uganda has made commendable progress in the prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS, Musoba said.

“We have expanded access to antiretroviral therapy, strengthened prevention programmes and improved survival and quality of life for people living with HIV,” he said.

Musoba, however, said there is a need to acknowledge that new infections continue to occur, particularly among young people, key populations and vulnerable groups. Stigma, misinformation and risk behaviours still threaten the gains the country has made.