

UGANDA ROLLS OUT HIV JAB, FIRST USER SPEAKS OUT

By John Musenze and Agnes Kyotalengerire

Uganda has officially rolled out the long-acting six-month HIV prevention injection in Lira city, with 40 doses of the drug delivered and 20 people receiving the injection on Friday.

Among them was Belmos Gom, who became the first person in Uganda to receive the drug known as Lenacapavir.

"I had read about it before. They had been talking about it on the radio. When I heard it was being launched here, I came to see whether they were just announcing it or actually giving it out. When I found people receiving it, I said, why not me?" the 29-year-old told *New Vision* shortly after receiving the jab.

Gom said the journey to receiving the injection began with counselling, followed by an HIV test. After being confirmed HIV-negative, he was taken through another round of screening to determine whether he qualified for the drug.

"The screening involved a lot of questions. It took about 10 minutes as the health worker was ticking boxes on a form. They asked me how often I have sex, how many partners I have, the kind of work I do and even about my partner's sex life," Gom recalled.

Only after passing this stage was he cleared to receive the jab. Unlike routine injections typically given in the upper arm, Lenacapavir at the launch was administered either on the abdomen or the thigh, depending on the client's choice.

Gom received two injections at the same time on the abdomen.

"It is very easy. Not painful at all," he said.

After the injections, Gom was given four tablets; two to be taken immediately and two more after 24 hours to help the drug work in his system.

Beyond the simplicity of the procedure lies a much bigger story that could redefine how Uganda prevents new HIV infections. Gom's girlfriend visits on weekends. Like many young Ugandans, he describes himself as sexually active, but also aware of the risks.

"You may trust yourself, but you can't always be sure about your partner. Even if you have one partner, you don't know what they are doing 'outside'. So it is important to protect yourself," he said.

For Gom, choosing Lenacapavir was about taking control of his health.

"You are

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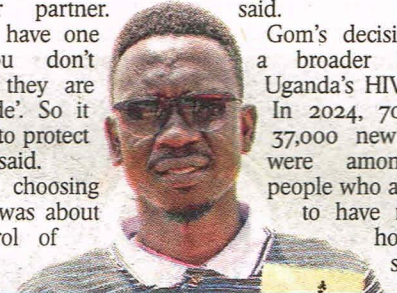
Health minister Dr Jane Ruth Aceng cautioned that the six-month HIV prevention injection only protects an individual against HIV and not other diseases.

"While clinical trials show it is highly effective in preventing HIV when used correctly, it does not prevent infections, such as gonorrhoea, syphilis or chlamydia, nor does it protect against pregnancy. That's why we urge you to remain responsible even after receiving this pre-exposure prophylaxis," she said.

the CEO of your life. No one takes care of your life. I feel safe from HIV now. I also know I still have to be careful, but for now, no more condoms," he said.

Gom's decision reflects a broader reality in Uganda's HIV response.

In 2024, 70% of the 37,000 new infections were among young people who are believed to have no say on how to have sex, putting them



Got HIV prevention injection: Gom

Aceng signing the guidelines for HIV pre-exposure and post-exposure prophylaxis.

This was during the official rollout of Lenacapavir injection in Lira city on Friday



at high risk of acquiring the disease.

WHAT IS LENACAPAVIR?

Lenacapavir is a new form of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medication taken by HIV-negative individuals to prevent infection. Unlike daily pills, Lenacapavir is administered as an injection once every six months, offering long-term protection without the burden of daily adherence.

Dr Flavia Matovu Kiweewa, who was the lead scientist of Lenacapavir trials in Uganda, said the drug works by slowly releasing medicine into the body over time, maintaining protective levels that block HIV infection.

She said after receiving the injection, clients are given a short course of tablets for two days to help the drug reach effective levels in the body more quickly.

"The injection does not work instantly. If you want to be protected early, you must take

the four oral pills provided and wait 48 hours before having sex. Do not rush into sex immediately after the injection. Wait 48 hours, take the pills, and give the drug time to work," she said.

SCREENING

Harriet Nangobi, a Ministry of Health resource person supporting the rollout, said not everyone qualifies for the injection.

She said those considered potential candidates for the injection include individuals with multiple sexual partners, those unsure of their partner's HIV status, people in relationships with HIV-positive partners whose viral load is not suppressed, people who inject drugs, sexually-active adolescent girls and young women, truck drivers and discordant couples.

The screening ensures that the limited initial supply reaches those who need it most, according to the health ministry.

Nangobi said one of the biggest misconceptions is that

Lenacapavir is a vaccine.

"This gives only protection for just six months, it's PrEP, not a vaccine," she said.

While officiating the launch, health minister Dr Jane Ruth Aceng described Lenacapavir as a game-changer in HIV prevention, making it easier for people to protect themselves without the burden of taking daily pills.

She said Uganda has made significant progress in reducing new HIV infections from 96,000 in 2010 to about 37,000 by the end of 2025.

Over 1.4 million people are currently on treatment, with about 100 new infections occurring every day.

"The rollout of Lenacapavir will be phased, prioritising people at risk in high-burden districts. The Ministry of Health has completed training in 103 health facilities across the country that will begin the phase 1 implementation this April. By December 2026, a total of 300 health facilities shall be expected to provide Lenacapavir for PrEP," Aceng said.