

# New HIV drug: Recipients warned against recklessness

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BY TONNY ABET

Health experts have issued a warning to recipients of Lenacapavir, the groundbreaking twice a year injectable drug for HIV prevention, urging them not to engage in reckless sexual behaviour despite its high efficacy.

Approved for pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), Lenacapavir marks a major advancement in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Administered as just two injections per year on the abdomen or thigh, it has demonstrated over 99 percent effectiveness in stopping HIV infections in clinical trials conducted in Uganda and South Africa.

The national roll-out was launched on April 17, in Lira City, which has one of the highest HIV prevalence rates in the country. Currently, at least 103 health facilities are providing the free injections, including all regional referral hospitals.

Dr Robert Mutumba, head of the Aids Control Programme at the Ministry of Health, in an interview, cautioned that Lenacapavir is not a "silver bullet."

"The appetite for Lenacapavir is very high, but we ought to understand that even as individuals receive this injection, they should not forget about getting an unintended pregnancy, so that we do not end up with a high rate of unsafe abortion, he said.

Dr Mutumba added that "the injection does not protect them against contracting other sexually transmitted infections

such as Hepatitis B, Chlamydia and Gonorrhoea."

He stressed the need for comprehensive prevention. "It is not just about receiving a Lenacapavir injection, but it is really about people understanding the broader HIV prevention approaches," he said.

Dr Richard Kabanda, commissioner for health promotion, echoed these concerns, observing that biomedical innovations have sometimes led to decreased risk perception, especially among young people.

"Risk perception is very low for HIV. So, as we launch Lenacapavir today, I think that the technical teams need to sit and think deeply on how we are going to increase the risk perception," Dr Kabanda said.

Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, the minister of Health, described the launch as a "game-changer" while reminding Ugandans not to abandon proven strategies.

## Progress

"We have reduced new HIV infections from 96,000 in 2010 to 37,000 by the end of 2025... We have 1.4 million Ugandans on treatment," she said.

She added: "However, HIV is still with us. About 100 new individuals acquire HIV every day, of whom 33 are young people, majorly adolescent girls and young women."

Dr Aceng highlighted the convenience of Lenacapavir for those who struggle with daily oral PrEP pills.

"It is highly effective and offers new hope, especially for individuals at the highest risk," she said.

The minister said Uganda is committed to ending Aids as a public health threat by 2030 through a combination prevention strategy that integrates biomedical tools like Lenacapavir with behavioural and structural interventions.

Dr Aceng She called for adherence to the classic ABC approach: Abstinence for young people, until ready for marriage, being faithful to one partner, and correct and consistent condom use for those with multiple partners.

Dr Aceng She also encouraged regular HIV testing, which is free and confidential, including self-testing kits available at health facilities and pharmacies.



Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, the minister of Health (holding dummy needle), launches Lenacapavir injection in Lira on April 17. PHOTO/TONNY ABET

## 19,200 DOSES

### High burden areas

The initial batch of 19,200 doses, donated by the Global Fund, targets high-burden areas, with plans to expand to 300 health facilities by December 2026. Uganda expects to receive 94,560 doses, enough to cover at least 47,280 people initially.

The government is committed to ending Aids as a public health threat by 2030.