

Acholi chiefdom asks HIV/Aids body to resume night testing for virus

BY TOBBIAS JOLLY OWINY

GULU. The Acholi cultural chiefdom has called upon the Uganda Aids Commission (UAC) to resume mobile night blood testing to curb the rapid spread of HIV in Gulu City.

At the weekend, UAC officials led by its mid-north zonal coordinator, Mr Victor Rwengabo, met with the cultural leaders at the Acholi chiefdom headquarters in Gulu City to disseminate their 2025 findings of HIV prevalence in the Acholi Sub-region.

During the engagement, the cultural leaders stated that HIV prevalence remains highest in Gulu City compared to other urban centres across the region

due to the transit population and that stigma stops many from going for tests during the day.

"Introduce automated night testing as people are getting infected in the urban centres, but fear going for testing because once you are seen, it attracts a lot of stigma," Mr Michael Acaye, the Koro clan chief explained.

He added that this perpetuates infections

Meanwhile, Mr Geoffrey Okello Okuna, the chiefdom's minister for communication, said the introduction of incentives for those who test voluntarily will persuade the community to adopt it.

"That is because people only want to test when they are already presenting primary symptoms of the disease," he

HIV STATISTICS

Acholi Sub-region HIV/Aids prevalence rate stands at second place after South Buganda at 7.7 percent, with Gulu City ranking at 9.8 percent.

said.

Mr Acaye called for the cancellation of trading licences of business premises that run lodges and brothels that are said to be promoting prostitution across Gulu City.

"We conducted an inquiry and learned that girls as young as 13 are allowed into these places to do prostitu-

tion; and the city authorities still renew their licences. That is unfortunate," Mr Acaye said.

In an interview, Ms Florence Amito, the HIV/Aids focal point person for Gulu City, said night tests, referred to as moonlight testing, were only stopped due to funding gaps.

"Moonlight testing were funded by USAID support. That enabled The Aids Support Organisation (TASO) to get support in terms of transport, fuel, equipment and mobilisation," Ms Amito said.

Alternatively, she said the Health ministry recently introduced safer and private testing options, including saliva swabs, and self-testing kits that enable one to test themselves in confidentiality to avoid stigma.

"We encourage that these kits are picked from health facilities so people are counselled and guided, but in most cases, individuals do not call us back to explain the test outcome," she said.

Mr Rwengabo added that several factors were identified to be driving the high HIV prevalence rates. They include stigma and discrimination, widow inheritance, polygamy, sexual gender-based violence, prostitution due to poverty, among others.

"In urban set-up, we have lodges and brothels where young girls and women sell sex, the commercial sex workers, we have the transit population like truck drivers, including migrant sex workers who come from other towns like Lira, Kiryandongo, etc," Mr Rwengabo said.