

# Rakai records big drop in HIV rates in 17 years

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**KAMPALA.** Rakai District today marks World Aids Day on a positive note, with incidence of HIV infections in the central district having dropped by 42 per cent between 1999 and 2016.

The district, where the first case of HIV virus was discovered on the shores of Lake Victoria in 1982, has seen its HIV prevalence rate dropping from 12 per cent to 6.6 per cent, according to new research findings; the Rakai Community Cohort Study.

The study by Rakai Health Sciences Programme indicates that the drop

is a result of a seven-year prevention strategy combined with increased treatment, voluntary medical male circumcision, and behavioral change communication.

The researchers are now optimistic that the findings provide evidence that the same strategy can be used globally to cause a significant HIV infection reduction.

Prof David Serwadda, the principal researcher, said "...we are anxious to see what impact you would get in terms of reduction in the acquisition of new infections. So, we are very excited about these new results and this is one of the first researches that have demonstrated the actual impact of

combination prevention and we believe the amount of HIV now in Rakai has actually reduced significantly."

He was speaking yesterday at the dissemination of the research findings in Kampala ahead of the World Aids Day national celebrations in Kileleshwa District today.

**6.6%**

**Prevalence.** The current HIV prevalence rate in Rakai District

But the study reveals a gender difference in the impact of the strategy with reduction in the number of new

infection being greater in men at 54 per cent compared to the 32 per cent reduction in women.

The researchers attributed greater reduction in men to their benefiting from protective effect of male circumcision and at the same time more women being on treatment.

The 2016 national statistics also indicated that the adult HIV prevalence is higher among women at 7.5 per cent compared to 4.3 per cent among men.

To arrive at the final results, the study looked at the number of new infections before the combination strategy in 2004, and the next five to seven-year period after introducing

combination prevention strategy.

The results, the researchers say, allude to the fact that combination prevention strategy actually works.

They also recommend need for more efforts towards men getting on treatment so they can also protect the women as well as scaling up more prevention measures such as Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

Dr Joshua Musinguzi, the programme manager of the Aids Control Programme at Ministry of Health, said the research findings have posed a challenge to government to start implementing other proposed interventions that were still pending.

Mr Moses Sakor, the district health officer, said the residents were excited about the findings, which now demonstrates to the whole world that there is value for the money invested in the different interventions.

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