

# HIV infections drop among children – survey

By Taddeo Swambale

The number of new HIV infections among children (0-14 years) in Uganda has consistently dropped over the last five years, but experts warn that the latest figures remain too high as targets loom.

In 2016, an estimated 4,600 children contracted HIV, a significant drop from 26,000 new infections in 2014, preliminary findings of the Uganda Population-Based HIV Impact Assessment reveal.

Overall, the number of Ugandans who got infected with HIV dropped sharply to 52,000 in 2016, up from 99,000 in 2014, according to the survey.

The partial findings of the survey released in August indicated that prevalence of HIV among adults aged 15 and 49 years in Uganda dropped to 6%, up from 7.3% in 2014. Final results will be released next year.

Dr Nelson Musoba, the acting director general of the Uganda AIDS Commission, said a strong public campaign encouraging HIV prevention might have had a hand in the drop in new infections.

"Analysis of the survey findings is being done by experts at the ministry. However, our general conclusion is that our prevention intervention is working," Musoba said at a media briefing in Kampala.

He was confident that Uganda was on course to achieve the 90-90-90 HIV global goal that seeks to ensure that by the year 2020, 90% of all people living with HIV know their status, 90% of those diagnosed HIV are on ART therapy and 90% of all people on ART therapy have viral suppression.

"We are performing ahead of the global target in some areas and we are certain to meet those goals by 2020," Musoba told *New Vision* in an interview.

The UNAIDS country director, Dr Karusa Kiragu-Gikonyo, yesterday described the survey findings as a reflection of good progress in the fight against HIV but said a lot more was required to tame the scourge.

"Uganda is making a lot of progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS but when you have 1,000 people getting infected every week, it means that a lot more work is needed to address the problem," she stated.

She noted that increasing access to health services was critical in ending the HIV scourge.

## World AIDS Day

On December 1, Uganda will join the rest of the world to commemorate World AIDS Day, marked every year globally since 1988 to raise awareness about the AIDS scourge caused by the spread of HIV.

According to the World AIDS Report 2017, 36.7 million people globally are living with HIV and 20.9 million of them are on treatment.

In 2016, 1.8 million contracted HIV and the infection caused one million deaths. Since it was uncovered, 76 million people have been infected and about half (35 million have died from it).

HIV still ravages more women compared to men, with statistics showing that every four minutes, three girls get infected with HIV across the globe.

In Uganda, about 1.6 million people are living with HIV and an estimated one million people were on treatment by June, with 300,000 enrolled over the past year, according to the Uganda AIDS Commission.