

Mukono district launches campaign to fight HIV/AIDS

MUKONO

By Andrew Ssenyonga

Mukono district has launched a campaign to fight HIV/AIDS among young women and adolescent girls aged 15-24 years.

The two-year campaign dubbed "Lead, Evidence, Advocate, Research Network" (LEARN) is using research, advocacy and young women's leadership to ensure HIV prevention.

It also includes the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), where an HIV-negative person takes medicine to prevent them from catching HIV.

The deputy chief administrative officer of Mukono, Jonathan Mukose, said the increasing number of HIV/AIDS infections among young people in the district is worrying local leaders.

"We are not doing well in terms of HIV/AIDS prevention. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS in Mukono is 9%, which is higher than the national rate of 7%," he said.

According to the district's population data, young people aged between 15 and 24 years make up 35% (213,638) of the population. But the burden of HIV/AIDS among this age group is very high, constituting 9% among females and 4.4% in males.

Mukose made the revelation during the launch of LEARN research project at Mukono Resort Hotel in Mukono district on Wednesday.

The project is spearheaded by ATHENA, in partnership with International Community of Women Living with HIV in East Africa (ICWEA) to share information on PrEP and HIV prevention.

The meeting was attended by the young women who are expected to gather meaningful information from

their communities and drive the HIV prevention agendas, which are responsive to young women's needs, priorities and preferences.

Mukose said Mukono can only be part of the Presidential Fast-Track Initiative to end HIV/AIDS by 2030 if unavailability of commodities such as anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) and STI drugs is addressed.

He advised partners in the struggle against HIV/AIDS in the district to also target men, who he said are fuelling the spread of the disease since most of them do not want to test for HIV.

The district local government secretary of health, gender and security, Samalie Musenero, said there are some pastors, especially in Pentecostal churches, misleading people living with HIV that they have been healed of the disease and advise them to stop taking medication.

"I have buried many people who have succumbed to AIDS after stopping to take medication on the advice of pastors. We ask the Government to investigate such churches and punish the culprits," Musenero said.

The LEARN project coordinator, Hajjarah Nagadya, said the project is an opportunity for young women to have a voice in something that may directly impact their lives.

"Overall, LEARN focuses on creating environments for adolescent girls and young women to be informed about PrEP as it relates to their lives," she said.

Martha Akello, the communications officer of the organisation, said the meeting was organised to, among other objectives, create awareness on the realities of young women as they access sexual and reproductive health services in facilities around Mukono.