

# 12 health checks you must do this year

## Cancer

Cancer is increasingly becoming a public health challenge in the country, with figures showing that breast and prostate cancers have increased by 3.5% and 5.2% respectively, annually in the last decade. The Uganda Cancer Institute conducts free screening sessions for the general public on Mondays. It is, therefore, recommended that everyone undergoes the screening tests to rule out chances of cancer, but also be able to arrest the condition in its early stages. People with a genetic predisposition to cancer should consider regular screening.

After the age of 40, men are encouraged to screen for prostate cancer because the risk increases with age and a positive history of such cancers in the family. Since October 2015, the Government rolled out the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination for girls aged 10.

## Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B as described by the World Health Organisation is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic ailments. It is highly contagious and is transmitted through contact with blood and/or other body fluids of an infected person.

In the last few years, there has been a reported rise in the number of people living with hepatitis B with a national prevalence as high as 10% and some areas at 20%. This is way higher than the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate currently at 7.5% (age 15-49).

The Skin and STI clinic at Kiruddu Hospital, Kampala offers free weekly testing services for hepatitis B.

However, you can opt for services in private health facilities where testing ranges from sh10,000 to sh25,000. If one is found negative, vaccination is recommended with a shot going for sh15,000 to sh20,000. You need three shots at an intervals recommended by the health worker.

## Sexually Transmitted Infections

Other than HIV/AIDS, there are a number of other sexually transmitted infections that you would want to clear yourself of or just be sure

For many people, visiting a health facility is precipitated by either pain or an illness. Many a disease are first discovered at post-mortem after sudden death like in the case of a fatal heart attack. But, as experts argue, the earlier a condition is detected, the better the chances of management, saving costs and prolonging life. There are a number of tests specific to age and sex whereas others are critical before you start work or travel. As explained by experts, the health status of a given population has a huge bearing on the rate at which a country develops. As part of the health 2017 strategy, **Gloria Nakajubi** spoke to health experts on the must do health checks.

you have not picked them up in the past year. These include syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia.

## Sickle cell disease

In a 2016 cross-sectional study titled, *Burden of sickle cell trait and disease in the Uganda Sickle Surveillance Study*, at least 15,000 babies are born with sickle cell disease in Uganda per year.

Sickle cell disease is a hereditary blood disease where by one's red blood cells become rigid and sticky and are shaped like a sickle or a crescent. These unusually shaped cells tend to clog in the veins and block blood flow. This leaves many in excruciating pain.

Dr Robert Opoka, a senior lecturer at Makerere University and working with the Sickle Cell Clinic at Mulago Hospital, said it takes two people, both carriers of the sickle cell trait to have a child with the disease. It is, therefore, important to take a test before a marriage or a relationship with an intention of having children.

Other than management and the astronomically high cost of bone marrow transplant, there is no other potential cure for sickle cell disease. This is also recommended only for children under the age of 16.

A sickle cell test goes for about sh20,000 at the Uganda Cancer Institute, whereas in private facilities, one can get it between sh35,000 and sh50,000.

## Body Mass Index

According to Dr Joel Kimera at Norvik Hospital, Kampala, Body Mass Index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on weight and height. This in a way helps to keep one's weight in check and prevent the would-be health challenges.

According to Kimera, obesity is as revealed by different studies is associated with multiple cancers such as breast, oesophagus, renal cell cancer etc) and other lifestyle diseases such as heart disease,

hypertension and diabetes. BMI is calculated by dividing one's weight by the height. Normal BMI is between 18 and 25. Between 25-29.9, one is considered overweight, higher than 30 is obesity whereas at less than 18, one is considered underweight. With a growing number of people adopting diet regimens, BMI comes in handy as a guide to your body's dietary needs.

## Blood sugar test

This is recommended for people at risk of diabetes. Kimera says this is more informative than carrying out a random sugar test. The test can be done at any health facility. With guidance from the medical worker, self testing is recommended especially for people at risk or living with diabetes.

## Bone mineral density

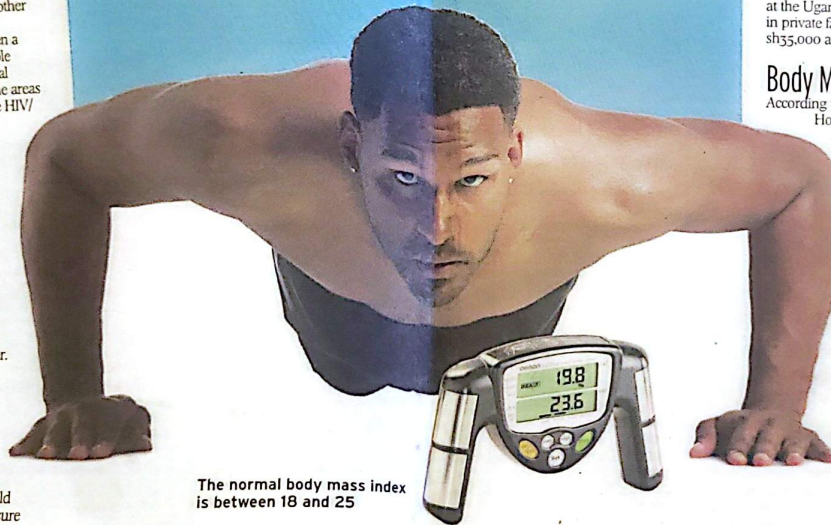
This is recommended from people who are 65 years and older. It is an x-ray test that measures the density of minerals such as calcium in one's bones.

The onset of menopause, according to the doctors, lowers oestrogen levels, hence making women more susceptible to fractures. In case of a lower than normal bone mineral density, the doctor is able to recommend interventions to improve it. These include exercises and a diet high on calcium and vitamin D. The test is mostly recommended for women.

## HIV/AIDS

The threat of HIV/AIDS is still real. Data from the 2014 HIV and AIDS Country report shows that HIV prevalence in the general population increased from 6.4% in 2004/5 to 7.5% by 2011 and currently at 7.4%.

But, as has been argued by different health experts, an end to the spread of HIV/AIDS starts with you knowing your status. It takes not more than 30 minutes to have your results and this can be done at any public health facility for free. You can also get the services at private facilities at as low as sh5,000.



The normal body mass index is between 18 and 25

**15,000** The number of babies are born with sickle cell disease in Uganda per year

**Sh20,000** The amount of money that a shot of hepatitis B vaccination costs

Lead to early breast cancer detection and prevention