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Saturday Vision

SEVEN DAYS ONE PAPER

HIV spread down, more is still needed

The ministry of Health has just released results of the Uganda HIV Impact Assessment which show that the percentage of Ugandans living with HIV (prevalence) has dropped from 7.3% to 6%.

This was predictable after Uganda achieved the tipping point in 2015 when we started enrolling more people living with HIV on ARVs than the new infections recorded in the year. The Government announced then that over 700,000 were on HIV drugs (ARVs) against 140,000 new infections.

While this is good news – and all stakeholders in the fight need to be applauded, it calls for more efforts not less. It is time to push harder because any relaxation will easily reverse the trend of success.

People taking ARVs bring down their viral load and, therefore, their infectiousness. The survey found that 57.4% of these had reduced HIV in their blood to undetectable levels. We need to increase this percentage by supporting them on adherence, encouraging many to test and treat all who test positive as well as fight stigma.

Proven HIV prevention strategies such as safe male circumcision, and Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) need to be rolled out free of charge. Used in combination, they can prevent many from getting the virus.

We also need to be bold enough to stop stigma and criminalising HIV among sex workers, drug addicts and others.

Otherwise they go underground and continue spreading the virus from there. The prevention needs of such people should be prioritised if only to protect the rest.



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