

# Bushenyi leaders warn of high HIV cases

BY HILLARY TWINAMATSIKO

**BUSHENYI.** Bushenyi District leaders have raised alarm over the increasingly reckless lifestyle among young people, warning that it is fuelling the rise in HIV/Aids infections.

The concern came as the district commemorated World Aids Day yesterday at Kizinda playground. Leaders said Bushenyi's HIV prevalence rate stands at 9 percent, far above the national average of 4.9 percent.

Statistics from the Uganda Aids Commission (UAC) reveal a worrying trend: most new infections occur among young women aged 15 to 24 and older men aged 35 and above, pointing to widespread cross-generational sexual relationships.

The district's major hotspots are the busy town councils of Kizinda, Kyamuhunga-Kigoma and Rwentuuha, which are marked by urban growth, tea factories, universities and thriving businesses. Kizinda Town Council alone has about 168 bars and a local HIV prevalence rate of 8 percent.

Dr Stephen Bainomugisha, the district health officer, expressed concern that many people testing positive are students in institutions of higher learning.

"The most affected are the youth in higher institutions. As we reach out with information, the key message must be about behaviour change," he said. "We've also found that many lodges and bars don't have condoms, especially in the town councils identified as hotspots."

Mr John Kateeba, the executive director of the Initiative for Better Health, said ongoing awareness initiatives such as the Empuumo marathon aim to contribute to the national goal of ending HIV-related deaths by 2030.

"We are raising awareness to control new infections and ensure no one dies of HIV by 2030," he said.

Mr Kateeba added that Kizinda's congestion, numerous businesses, university students and presence of commercial sex workers—some from neighbouring countries—make it a high-risk area.

## Appeal

Health workers have urged all stakeholders, including political leaders and the business community, to take an active role in prevention efforts, warning that the future of young people is at risk.

Ms Nancy Nyamweya, a clinical officer in Bushenyi, said: "HIV should not be left to health workers alone. We need political leaders, technical staff and the business community to speak to young people because if they perish now, we won't have a future."

Kizinda Town Council Youth Councillor Evas Kedembe said some residents claim condoms are too expensive, with four condoms reportedly sold at Shs2,500.

She also urged the government to rethink condom flavours. "Most of us don't like the scent of government condoms. If they added flavours like strawberry or chocolate, more people would use them," she said.