

MEDICAL CHECK-UPS YOU MUST DO IN 2026

By Agnes Kyatalengerie

As Uganda battles a surge in silent killers, such as diabetes, hypertension, stroke and cancer, one truth is that early detection saves lives. Most of these conditions show no symptoms, until it's too late, yet they can be caught early with tests.

In 2026, commit to a health reset that includes scheduling essential screenings. These screenings can be for blood sugar, blood pressure, kidney function, HIV, cancer, as well as dental and eye exams, among others. These routine checks are not just medical formalities; they are your strongest defence against preventable diseases.

In this guide, find out the key tests you should prioritise in 2026, why they matter and how often to do them.

DIABETES

The 2023 STEPS Survey revealed that Type 2 diabetes prevalence has doubled to 2.6%, up from 1.4% in 2014. This condition is strongly linked to a sedentary lifestyle, physical inactivity and excessive weight gain.

Meanwhile, an estimated 3,000 children and adolescents live with Type 1 diabetes, according to the International Diabetes Federation. Diabetes occurs when blood sugar levels remain persistently high and damage vital organs, such as the brain, heart, eyes, feet and the reproductive system if left untreated.

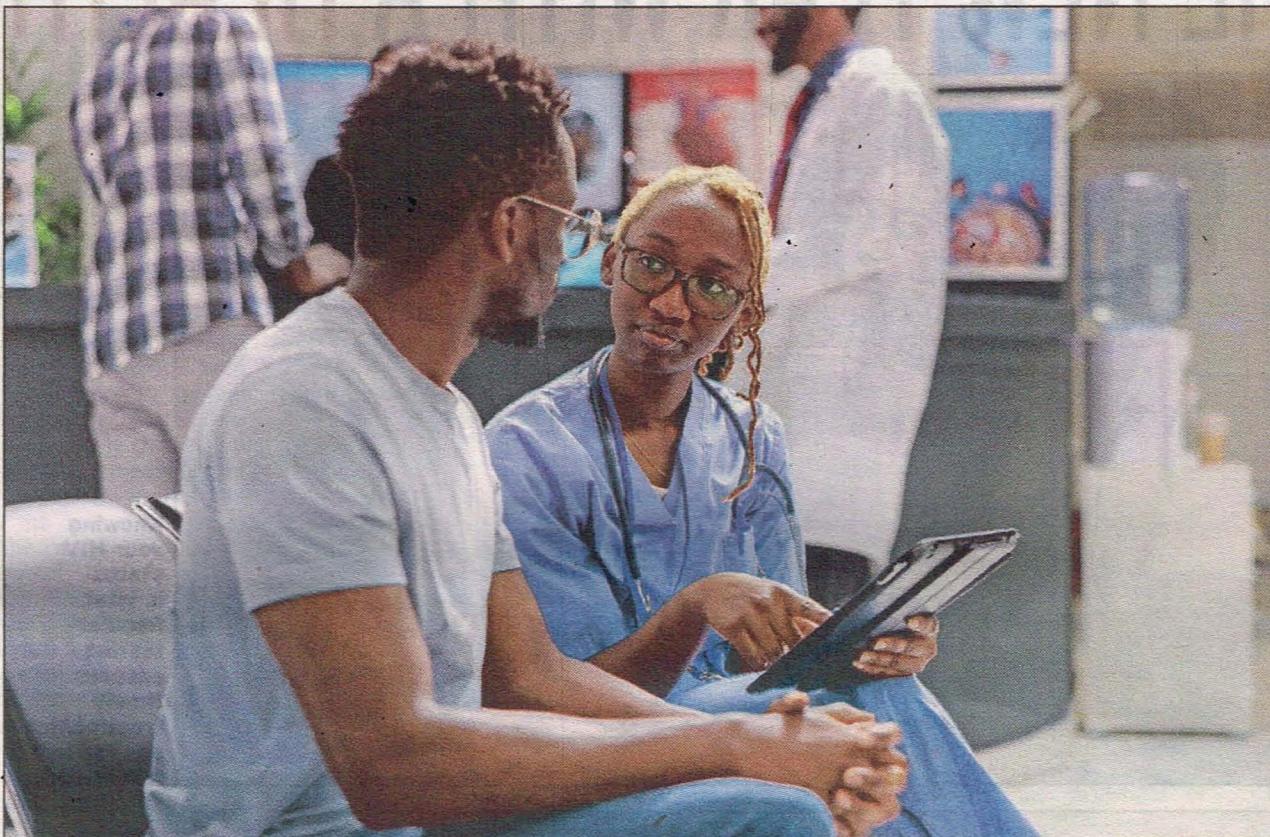
Prof. Silver Bahendeka, a senior consultant diabetologist at St Francis Nsamba Hospital, advises regular blood sugar checks. That is, at least once every three years starting at age 34 for those with a family history of diabetes. The ideal time to test is one hour after a meal or after consuming 75g of glucose, with normal levels being below 8.6 mmol/L.

For those already diagnosed, monitoring should be individualised under medical guidance.

STROKE

Data from the Stroke Rehabilitation Centre in Wampewo, Kampala, shows that in October 2025, nearly 30 new stroke patients were admitted, most aged 25 to 40. A stroke occurs when blood flow to the brain is interrupted, either by a clot or a ruptured vessel, leading to oxygen deprivation and brain cell death.

Ibrahim Bukenya, a principal senior physiotherapist at the



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PROSTATE AND TESTICULAR CANCERS

Dr Badru Ssekitoleko, a urologic oncologist at Mulago Hospital, urges men aged 40 and above to screen for prostate cancer annually. Those with a family history should start at age 35. Screening involves a blood test.

Prostate cancer is often detected late, at stages three or four, making early screening critical for effective treatment.

Another test that men should take is to assess their testes.

According to Ssekitoleko, you can also consider doing a monthly testicular self-examination, and the best time to do it is after a warm shower or bath because then the scrotal skin is relaxed.

HOW TO TEST

- Stand in front of a mirror. Look for a swelling or skin changes.
- Check one testicle at a time.
- Gently roll the testicle between thumb and fingers.



Omagino



Jatho



Kalyesubula

centre, emphasises that the best prevention is regular blood pressure and blood sugar checks. He adds that it is hard to tell when one will suffer a stroke. However, if you are hypertensive or diabetic and, upon checking, the results show that your blood pressure or sugar is elevated, health workers give you medication immediately.

Bukenya notes that non-communicable diseases account for up to 87% of all

diseases in Uganda, with stroke ranking second.

HYPERTENSION The heart is central to life and regular cardiovascular check-ups are essential. Dr John Omagino, the executive director of the Uganda Heart Institute, warns that hypertension, often called a "silent killer", can lead to heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure and sudden death if untreated.

CERVICAL CANCER For women aged 25 and above or those sexually active, annual cervical cancer screening is a must, advises Dr Fred Oktetu. Globally, hypertension

smear is mid-cycle, that is, between days nine and 20 of your menstrual cycle.

Dr Alfred Jatho, the head of community cancer services at UCI, reports that 70% of cervical cancers are detected early, but late-stage cases are difficult to treat. Cervical cancer is Uganda's leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women, with 6,959 new cases and 4,607 deaths annually.

The disease starts in the cells of the cervix, the lower part of the uterus. Persistent infection with certain strains of human papillomavirus (HPV) is the primary cause.

You can prevent cervical cancer through vaccinating your daughters aged between nine and 10 because presumably they are not yet sexually active, so they are not exposed to the virus, says the Uganda National Expanded Programme on Immunisation manager at the health ministry, Dr Michael Bagamire.

He further notes that the vaccine is available in public health facilities at no cost.

BREAST CANCER

Women aged 35 and above should undergo routine breast cancer screening, advises Dr James Kafeero of UCI. Clinical breast exams (CBE) should be complemented by monthly self-exams (SBE). If results are normal, repeat screening every three years.

Uganda records about 3,000 new breast cancer cases annually, up from 2,639 in 2020 (Globalcan2020). Of those, three in every 100 (3%) of breast cancer patients are men, with the commonest age group being between 40 and 50 years, with a mean age of about 45 years being registered.

Dr Nixon Niyonzima, who heads research and training at UCI, says given that men have very little breast tissue, the cancer spreads rapidly to the chest wall. This results in men being diagnosed with the disease in advanced stages.

Dental health matters, says Dr Anne Ampaire Musika, an ophthalmologist at Mulago Hospital.

Good vision is crucial for children's learning as 80% of classroom tasks rely on sight. Untreated early nearsightedness can lead to severe conditions later, including cataracts and glaucoma.

Plaque hardens into tartar, which brushing cannot remove, leading to gum disease. Schedule dental visits every six months and parents should monitor children's teeth for decay or misalignment.

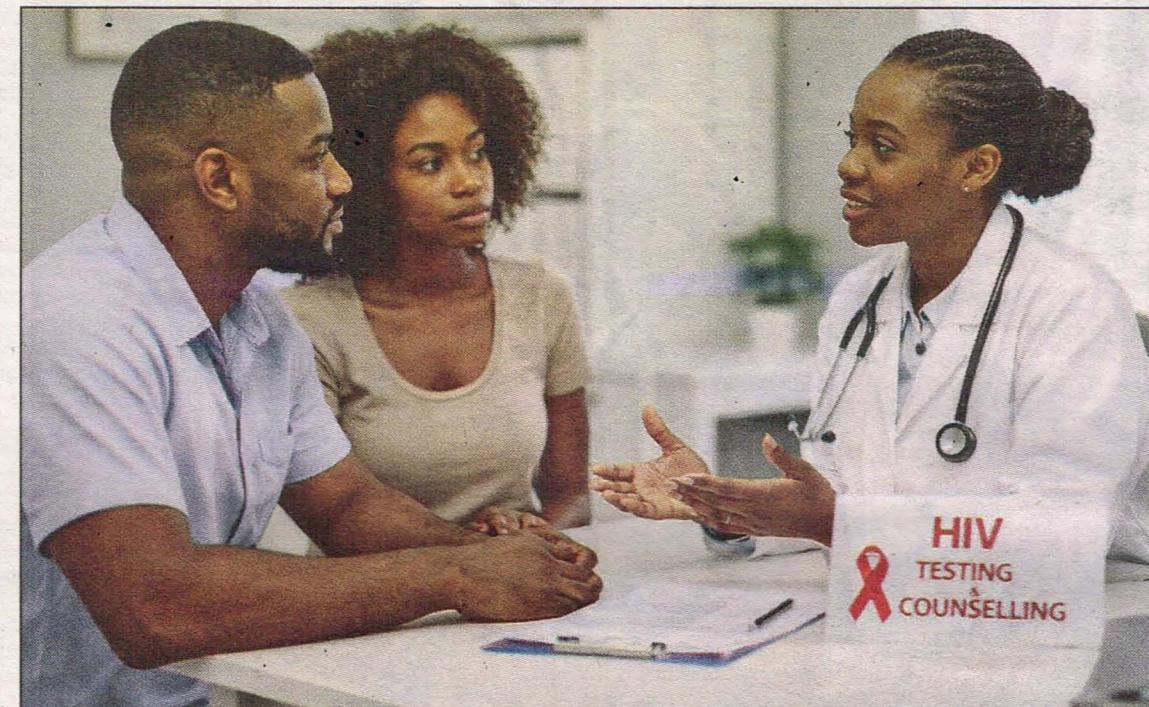
KIDNEY TESTS, WHY DO THEM Kidney disease is often silent, as about 80% of patients show no symptoms, warns Dr Robert Kalyesubula, a senior consultant nephrologist. The best prevention is routine screening through a blood test

EYE EXAMINATIONS Annual eye checks are essential, especially for those

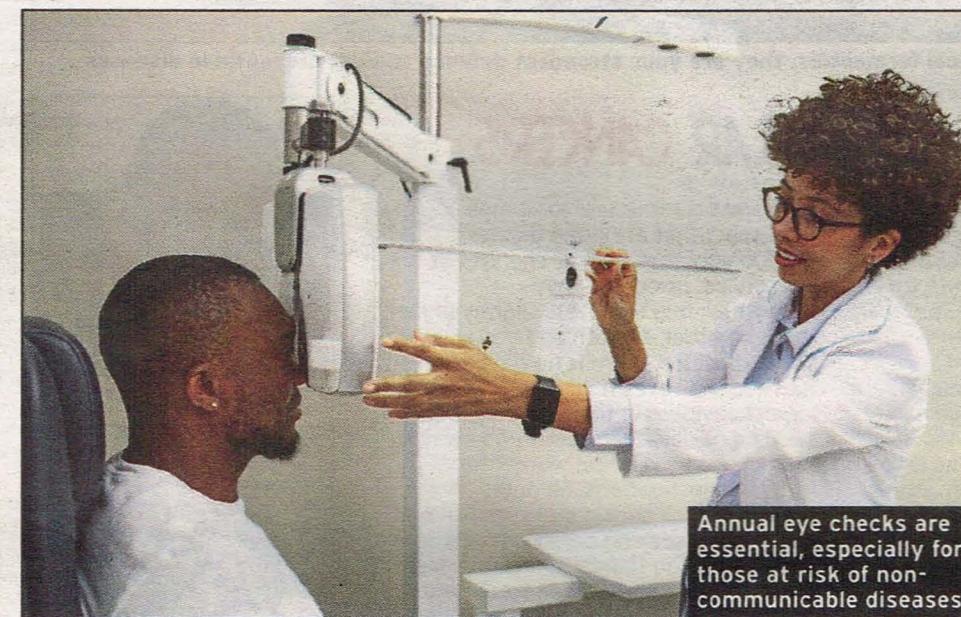
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START THE NEW YEAR WITH A HEALTH RESET

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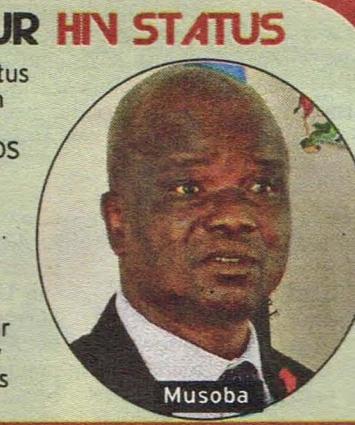
Knowing your HIV status is vital. Regular testing ensures timely treatment and reduces transmission



Annual eye checks are essential, especially for those at risk of non-communicable diseases



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KNOW YOUR HIV STATUS

Knowing your HIV status is vital, says Dr Nelson Musoba, the director general of Uganda AIDS Commission.

By December 2024, 94% of Uganda's 1.5 million people living with HIV had tested, leaving 6% unaware of their status. Regular testing ensures timely treatment and reduces transmission.

Men with prostate cancer should also check their bone health, as the disease often spreads to the spine.

LUNG HEALTH Dr Bruce Kirenga, the director

of Makerere University Lung Institute, notes that there is not much a general check-up people can do for the lungs; one can do a chest X-ray, especially for people who are above 40 years, every two to

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental ill health is a growing concern and it is triggered by high levels of stress. Data on mental illness in Uganda is very scanty since some people do not report the problem because of stigma and fear. Others harbour the perception that mental health is not a medical problem but rather a witchcraft-related illness.

The World Health Organisation estimates reveal that 10% of the population has suffered from mental illness. This implies that 10% of Uganda's population has suffered from any form of mental illness.

If you are feeling stressed, consider seeking stress screening or counselling services, advises Derrick Kizza Mbuga, who is the executive director of Mental Health Uganda.

OTHER VITAL HEALTH CHECKS

Hepatitis B screening services are available in public health facilities at no cost and in private clinics, the test costs as low as sh10,000.

Urinary tract infection tests can be done in any public and private health facilities for between sh10,000 and sh15,000.

Malaria screening services are available in public health facilities at no cost. Meanwhile, you can access a malaria test in a private health facility for as little as sh6,000.

ENT (Ear, Nose, Throat) examination services are available in any public and private health facilities across the country.

YOUR HEALTH, YOUR PRIORITY IN 2026

The numbers don't lie; silent diseases are on the rise and most strike without warning. But the good news is that prevention is within your control. From kidney and HIV tests to cancer screenings, BMI checks, dental and eye exams and even lung and bone assessments, these simple steps can make the difference between early treatment and late-stage complications.

As you plan for 2026, make health screening a non-negotiable part of your year. Schedule those tests, keep track of your results and encourage your loved ones to do the same. Because the best investment you can make this year isn't in gadgets or trends; it's in your health.

Start now. Stay ahead. Live well.