Rwanda is expected to begin offering a new long-acting HIV prevention drug, Lenacapavir Yeztugo, by 2026, according to the Rwanda Biomedical Center (RBC).

Dr. Basile Ikuzo, Director of HIV Prevention Unit at RBC, said the drug which is administered only twice a year could help ease the burden on high-risk groups who currently rely on daily pills or bimonthly injections for HIV prevention.

Speaking during an interview on *Waramutse Rwanda*, a morning program aired by Rwanda TV, Dr. Ikuzo said the drug has shown strong results in clinical trials and is likely to be introduced in Rwanda if ongoing preparations go well.

“Lenacapavir Yeztugo will reduce the stress of taking daily pills or six injections per year,” he said. “If all goes as planned, we may begin using it next year.”

The drug, developed by U.S.-based Gilead Sciences, was tested in several countries including Uganda, South Africa, Brazil, and the United States. A phase-three trial involving 5,300 participants mostly young women between ages 16 and 24 showed 99.9% effectiveness in preventing HIV infection. No infections were recorded among those who received the injection.

Additional trials were conducted on other high-risk groups such as men who have sex with men and transgender individuals, with equally promising results.

The injection is administered once every six months, making it a more convenient alternative to existing options in Rwanda. These include a daily oral pill and a two-month injectable, which is currently available in Kigali and expected to expand nationwide.

Existing prevention methods will continue, though daily pill usage may decrease if uptake of the new injection grows.

Currently, HIV prevention in Rwanda is targeted at groups considered to be at higher risk of infection, including sex workers, men who have sex with men, serodiscordant couples, and sexually active youth.

“This new injection will also be rolled out gradually, focusing on those key populations,” Dr. Ikuzo said. “It is not meant for everyone at once. The services are currently provided free of charge, and they are expensive—so we prioritize those at highest risk.”

He said that, over time the country may consider a co-payment model so that anyone interested in the injection can access it for a subsidized fee.

Rwanda is one of nine countries worldwide that have expressed interest in introducing the drug, with support from international partners such as the Global Fund and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation. These countries are expected to begin offering the drug by 2026.

Globally, the target is for over two million people to be using Lenacapavir Yeztugo annually once rollout begins.

Progress in HIV Treatment

Rwanda has made significant progress in HIV treatment and prevention. Currently, 97% of adults living with HIV are on antiretroviral therapy, while prevalence among those aged 15 to 49 is estimated at 2.7%.

Among children aged 0 to 14 living with HIV, 80% are on treatment. Additionally, 99% of children born to HIV-positive mothers reach the age of two without contracting the virus.

However, Dr. Ikuzo warned against faith-based misinformation claiming HIV can be cured through prayer.

"There are people who are told they've been healed, but HIV has no cure or vaccine," he said. "Some may test negative because their viral load is too low to detect, thanks to good adherence to medication—but the virus is still there."

He explained that while those with undetectable viral loads cannot transmit HIV through sex, people should continue using protection and taking their medication properly.

Declining HIV Deaths

On average, seven out of every 100 daily deaths in Rwanda are HIV-related—a decline from 11 years ago when about 20 people died each day from AIDS-related illnesses.

Health Ministry data show that Rwanda records roughly 3,200 new HIV infections and around 2,600 AIDS-related deaths each year.

Through prevention efforts and expanded access to treatment, the country has reduced new infections by 82% and AIDS-related deaths by 86% over the past decade.