

Uganda plans drug boost for AIDS fight

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Uganda's government is planning to double expenditure on anti-retroviral drugs in an effort to reverse a worsening trend in HIV infections, a senior health official said Thursday.

The doctor in charge of the [health ministry](#)'s AIDS control programme, Alex Ario, told AFP that over the next year some 1.3 million people will have free access to ARVs, compared to the 600,000 currently being treated.

Uganda was once heralded as a success story in the fight against HIV, with President Yoweri Museveni being among the first African leaders to speak openly about AIDS and the government mounting a highly successful public awareness campaign in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Infection rates initially dropped from double to single digits, but according to the most recent statistics, from 2011, the national prevalence rate rose to 7.3 percent from 6.4 percent in 2004-05—with health officials blaming increased complacency.

"We want to make HIV not a [health](#) problem anymore," the doctor said, explaining the drive would target those who have a low CD4 cell count—or the type of cells that fight infection—as well as the groups most at risk, such as sex workers, truckers and fishing communities.

"If we identify those who are positive early, put them on treatment early, we are going to reduce the community viral load. Once we reduce the community viral load, the rate of transmission in the community is going

to come down to very low levels," Ario explained.

The new policy is expected to cost about 120 million dollars (90 million euros) per year, Ario said, with donors being asked to pick up much of the bill.

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