RESEARCH | Study reveals that alcohol hampers uptake

Change size of HIV

pill, key groups say

Gays and prostitutes claim the drug that prevents infections is too big and blue colour noticeable

**BY GATONYE GATHURA**

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Kenyans taking a drug meant to prevent HIV have complained that

the pill is too big and its blue colour is too noticeable for

their liking. The residents of Nairobi and

Kilifi also said that the drug’s acceptance as a tool in the fight against HIV was high but those who take alcohol did not swallow the pill daily as advised.

The Kenyans were part of an international study that sought ways of improving Truvada, a pill that prevents HIV.

In a study published last month (19th October) in the

*Aids and Behaviour Journal* and carried out by among others,

Kenya Medical Research Institute, alcohol use was identified as a reason for not taking the pills on time or not taking them altogether.

The study on the drug Truvada, which is already registered in the country for use as an antiretroviral, also

found the pill to have other positive side effects. Some

study participants said the it increased their eating and sexual appetites.

“It helped me because there

were times I didn’t have any

appetite but when I started

taking the pill, I now eat a

lot,” the study quotes a participant.

Participants especially

those on the daily regimen are

reported to have experienced

increased libido.

The researchers were testing

two different dosage schedules;

one involving taking

of the Truvada pill daily and

another where one took the

pill two times a week.

The use of antiretroviral

drugs to prevent HIV infection

otherwise known as

Pre-exposure prophylaxis

(PrEP) is one of the latest

strategies to reduce the risk

of infection and has already

been approved by the World

Health Organisation.

The Kenya study involved

72 HIV negative volunteers;

31 were men who have sex

with men (MSM) and five female

prostitutes from Mtwapa,

Kilifi, while 36 were MSM from

Nairobi with an average age of

26 years.

For the pill to be more

acceptable, the participants

said its size, shape, colour,

and taste, all of which affected

comfort and ease of use, needs

to be improved.