

Benefits of getting tested for HIV

Introduction

The only way to know your HIV status for sure is to get tested. A person who is HIV positive may look and feel perfectly well, and be unaware that they are infected. There are no signs and symptoms that will enable you to know you have been infected and hence having an HIV antibody test is the only way you can know your HIV status.

Based on prevalence rates there is a stronger probability that you will test negative. Either way knowing your status will enable you to make informed decisions for your health.

The benefits of getting tested

1. **Access treatments and information:** The sooner you get tested, the sooner you can access treatments and information to help you manage the condition and delay the onset of Aids, should you test positive for HIV. The earlier on in the progress of the infection you get tested and get effective treatment, the easier it is to keep your immune system healthy.
2. **Protect your sex partner:** If you find out you are infected, you can make sure you protect your sex partner from becoming infected. If more people know their HIV status and use the knowledge to act responsibly, the pandemic can be better controlled. If you are HIV positive and on treatment with an undetectable viral load research shows that you cannot transmit the virus to your sexual partners this is known as U=U or Undetectable = Untransmittable. If you are HIV positive your sexual partner can consider accessing preventative treatment such as PrEP or Pre exposure prophylaxis.
3. **Prevent mother to child transmission:** If you are pregnant and test HIV positive, appropriate treatment can reduce the risk of your baby becoming infected. Without treatment, HIV-positive women have about a one-in-four chance of infecting their baby during pregnancy or birth. Treatment can reduce this figure to about one in 12.
4. **Planning for you and your loved ones future:** Finding out your HIV status as early as possible, gives you time, if you are infected, to make plans for yourself and your dependents to be looked after when you do get sick.
5. **Become part of the solution:** You can help **educate others about HIV/Aids**, and improve their attitudes and behaviour related to the disease, by talking about your HIV status and your decision to get tested. Remember that giving out this information is entirely your decision. The health professionals and counsellors who conduct and discuss the test with you must, by law, keep the results strictly confidential.

KNOW YOUR STATUS – GET TESTED

6. **Making healthy life choices for yourself:** Your doctor can monitor your immune system and help you avoid opportunistic diseases, or manage these when they occur. You may not be in a position to afford antiretroviral medications and other treatments. However, there are additional ways of ensuring that you stay as healthy as possible, such as learning about how to follow a lifestyle with good nutrition and suitable exercise, and avoiding damaging substances such as cigarettes and alcohol. HIV treatment is freely available through the national health services in most countries around the world.

Testing as part of HIV prevention: Treatment as prevention (TasP)

Treatment as prevention or (TasP) is a term used to describe HIV prevention methods that use antiretroviral treatment to decrease the chance of HIV transmission. In several studies of Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), the risk of getting HIV infection was much lower—up to 92% lower—for those who took the medicines consistently than for those who didn't take the medicines. For people who take PrEP pills daily their protection is estimated to be as high as 99%. PrEP is anti-retroviral therapy that a negative person takes to prevent them from becoming infected.

The first step to accessing PrEP is to know your status and hence undergo an HIV screening test. If you test negative you can consider accessing PrEP to enable you to stay negative.

Who Can Benefit from PrEP?

- Serodiscordant¹ couples: PrEP could help couples to conceive without transmitting HIV.
- People who are unable to insist on condom use: people who are victims of sexual violence or coercion, or who are unable to insist that their partners use condoms, to protect themselves. Millions of people could conceivably benefit from taking a pill a day as a way of reducing their risk of contracting HIV.
- Other populations at higher risk: A review published by the Centre for HIV Identification, Prevention, and Treatment Services, explains PrEP would benefit men who have sex with men (MSM), female partners of MSM and injection drug users and their partners.

Likewise if you think you have been exposed through blood to blood or sexual contact you might want to access PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis). You can only be considered for PEP if you have tested and have an HIV negative result.

¹ Serodiscordant: refers to a couple where one partner is HIV positive and the other HIV negative, alternatively a magnetic status relationship.

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What is Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)

If you have had unprotected sex (including if a condom broke or came off during sex) or shared drug injecting equipment with somebody you know is HIV positive, or is from a group at high risk of HIV, then you may be able to access a short course of HIV treatment intended to reduce the risk of you becoming infected with HIV. This is called post-exposure prophylaxis, or PEP for short

Who can benefit from PEP?

- People exposed to blood or bodily fluids at work: occupational circumstances, particularly for health care workers.
- Victims of rape or sexual assault: especially important for children who have been sexually assaulted.
- People who may have been exposed to HIV through consensual sexual contact: PEP may be recommended if it is known that the sexual partner has HIV, or whether the sexual partner is from a ‘high-risk group’.
- People potentially exposed through needles: For people who have shared needle equipment.

Know your status it could save your life.

World AIDS Day - 1 December 2018; Theme is – “KNOW YOUR STATUS – GET TESTED”

World AIDS Day

Know your status  Get a test



1 December

**THE RISK IS NOT
KNOWING.
GET TESTED.**

Alan Brand

POSITIVELY ALIVE ^{CC}

Employee Wellness Consultant and Specialist

Trainer, HIV+ Motivational Speaker

Mobile: +27 (82) 453-0560

E-mail: albrand@iafrica.com

Website: www.positivelyalive.co.za