

- You might feel afraid, angry, guilty or shocked. Strong feelings are normal. Find someone who can help you deal with how you feel. This might be a friend, a member of your family, a counsellor, a doctor, a health worker, a minister or a traditional healer. Remember **you** choose who you tell about your HIV status. You have the right to ask those people not to tell anyone else.

- You need to find out more about HIV, and how you can follow a diet and lifestyle that will help you stay healthy. You could talk to your doctor or health worker, or phone the AIDS helpline 0800 012 322. There are also many books on living positively with HIV and AIDS.

- Being HIV positive means you can infect someone else if you have sex without a condom. You need to talk to your sexual partner, or partners, about this and always use a condom when you have sex.

Difficult words

HIV: Human Immuno-deficiency Virus

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

AIDS-related illnesses: illnesses that are connected to AIDS

Responsibility: taking charge of something

Avoid: prevent

Transmission: the spread; passing something on

Relationship: you have a faithful partner

Pre-test counselling: help and support before you have the test

Laboratory: place where blood is checked

Confidential: private; not for anyone else to know

Post-test counselling: help and support after the test

Unprotected sex: sex without a condom

Risk: chance

HIV status: whether you are HIV positive or negative

Lifestyle: the way you live your life

AIDS

insights

Testing for HIV

In southern Africa HIV/AIDS is still spreading fast. Anyone who has had sex without using a condom could be infected with HIV. In this pamphlet, you can find information around testing for HIV:

- How to know if you've got HIV
- Making the decision to have an HIV test
- Having the HIV test
- Testing HIV negative
- Testing HIV positive

How to know if you've got HIV

- HIV can be in your body for 3 to 10 years before you get sick with AIDS
- You could live a healthy life for years and not know that you are infected with HIV.
- The only way to know you have HIV is to have an HIV test.

Making the decision to have an HIV test

You need to think carefully about whether you want to have an HIV test. You may want to talk about it with someone you trust first. Having



an HIV test is a way of taking responsibility for yourself. Only **you** can make the decision to have the test. Only **you** can decide on what choices you make afterwards.

The advantages of knowing you are infected with HIV are:

- You can take care of yourself and live longer.
- You can avoid infecting someone else.
- You can plan for the future.

Having the HIV test

- The best time to test is about 6 weeks after you think you may have been infected with HIV. This is because it can take up to six weeks for signs of HIV to show up in your blood.
- If you are in a sexual relationship, it is important that you and your partner talk about the test. It's best for you to go together and get tested at the same time.

- To have an HIV test you need to go to a doctor or a health worker at a clinic. First, they will talk about the test with you. This is called "pre-test counselling". They know that you may be afraid or worried. They can answer your questions and help prepare you for the result of the test.
- If you are willing, they will then take a sample of your blood. They will ask you to come back on another day to get the HIV test result.
- Your blood sample gets sent to a laboratory. At the laboratory they look for signs of HIV in your blood to see if you are HIV negative or positive.
- The result of your HIV test is always confidential. Whether you are HIV negative or HIV positive, the doctor or health worker will talk about the test result with you and explain what it means.

Testing HIV negative

Testing HIV negative means you do not have HIV in your blood. You can keep yourself HIV negative by:



One of the warning signs . . .

Watch for sudden or steady weightloss, when you are not trying to lose weight or exercising, and are still eating the same foods you always did.



Get treatment immediately if you have - or suspect you have - an STI

- Always using a condom when you have sex.
- Getting treatment immediately for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Having an STI greatly increases your risk of getting HIV.

Testing HIV positive

Testing HIV positive means that you have HIV in your blood. The test cannot tell you when you got the HIV infection, or when you will start to feel sick. You can live positively with HIV for many years!