

This vaccine helps strengthen the immune system against influenza, the virus that causes the flu.

- **Nutritional information and a multivitamin to take every day**

Many studies have demonstrated that good nutrition is a key ingredient in keeping the immune system healthy. You should ask your doctor about the foods you should eat and the foods you should not eat. Talk to him or her about taking a multivitamin every day.

- **Drugs to prevent *Pneumocystis Carinii* Pneumonia (PCP) and Toxoplasmosis**

Depending on your stage of HIV, your doctor may want you to take one or two pills every day (co-trimoxazole) to avoid these two infections. PCP and Toxoplasmosis can be very serious and are common in people with damaged immune systems.

- **A vaccine against HBV**

If you have not already been exposed to this virus - which can cause serious liver damage, your doctor should give you a vaccine to prevent you from getting it.

- **Treatment for syphilis**

If one of your blood tests shows that you are infected with syphilis, you will need to receive weekly injections of a drug called penicillin. This drug is very effective and only needs to be injected three times.

Additional information: Your doctor can't do everything for you. You will need to do a lot for yourself. First, you should know how to practice safer sex. This will help protect your sexual partner(s) from HIV and help protect you from other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). You should also look into services that can help you and your family members learn to cope with HIV and AIDS. Some clinics and AIDS organizations offer counselling and support groups for people living with HIV/AIDS and their families.

Affordability of medicines: Treating HIV is expensive. If you buy a medicine from a pharmacist or your doctor, always ask if a generic version is available. Approved generic medicines are cheaper than well-known brand-name ones and they are exactly the same quality. By law, if a cheaper generic version is available, a pharmacist must sell it to you instead of the brand-name version.

What about CD4+ cell count testing and viral load testing?

These two tests are used by many doctors around the world. As its name implies, a CD4+ cell count test looks for the number of CD4+ cells in a blood sample. Viral load testing measures the amount of virus in blood sample. Both tests are used to determine when antiretroviral drugs, medicines designed to help the immune system fight HIV, should be started and to determine if they are working properly.

In South Africa, antiretroviral drugs are not available to the general public. They are very expensive. The same goes for CD4+ cell count tests and viral load tests. They are costly and, given that antiretroviral drugs are not generally available, they may not provide much useful information.

TAC is currently working to increase the availability of antiretroviral drugs and these two tests in South Africa. In the meantime, the WHO staging system is an effective way to monitor your health and in making vital treatment decisions.