

*The Test*  
**Everyone**  
*Should Take*

Knowing your status  
will empower you to  
protect your body,  
your health and your  
partners.



*At first taking an HIV test might seem scary, but knowing your status will allow you to make decisions to protect your health and the health of your sexual partners.*

*If your test is negative, then knowing your status will help you make decisions to remain negative.*

*If your test is positive, then knowing your status will allow you to get treatment to live a long, healthy life.*

## **Pregnancy and HIV**

If you are pregnant, knowing your status is necessary to protect your health and the health of your baby. If you test positive you can get antiretroviral treatment (ART) to reduce the risk that your baby will be HIV-positive.

If you are planning on getting pregnant then you should first get tested for HIV, because starting treatment early reduces the chances of transmitting HIV to your baby. Your health is directly related to your baby's health, so protecting your health also protects the health of your baby.

## **How do I test for HIV?**

At a clinic or hospital you can request a test for HIV. Clinics and hospitals might call this VCT or voluntary counselling and testing. Voluntary means that you must give informed consent to be given an HIV test. Counselling means that

you will have the chance to discuss the test and the results with a trained counsellor. The test and its results are confidential. This means that your health workers must not tell anyone that you took the test or what the results were.

## **How do I get tested?**

The most common type of HIV test used in South Africa is called a rapid test. The rapid test involves taking a pin prick of blood from your finger. It takes less than 30 minutes for the results of a rapid test to come back.

## **How does the HIV test work?**

Health workers can tell if you have HIV by looking at a sample of your blood for HIV antibodies. HIV antibodies are your immune system's response to becoming infected with HIV. Most people develop HIV antibodies within 6 to 12 weeks after becoming infected.

## What do the results mean?

If your test is positive, this means that you have HIV.

If your test is negative this means that you do not have HIV.

Finding out you have HIV can be difficult. At first you might experience fear, anger and guilt. This is normal. But knowing your HIV status will allow you to get the treatment you need and improve your health.

## When to test again

It takes up to three months for an HIV test to show up positive after HIV infection. This is called the window period. If you test negative but have recently had vaginal or anal sex without

a condom then you must have another test in three months.

It is important to have regular tests for HIV (every three to six months) so that you are kept informed of your status. You must also always use a condom when you have sex in order to protect yourself and your partner from HIV infection.

## Does my test tell me what my partner's status is?

Your test will not tell you your partner's status as HIV is not transmitted every time you have sex. You must both know your status to make decisions to protect your health and the health of each other. Encourage your partner to get tested with you.

## What do I do if I find out that I am HIV-positive?

If you test positive, you should visit your GP or local clinic. The doctor or nurse will have to assess how advanced your HIV infection is. They will do a clinical staging looking for opportunistic infections (OIs) and a CD4 count (blood test). Examples of OIs are tuberculosis, cervical cancer and bacterial pneumonia. The CD4 count is a measure of your body's immunity.

If you are HIV-positive, it could be months to years before you develop AIDS. Your immune system is affected by HIV and the weaker your immune system is, the higher the risk of developing opportunistic infections (OIs) and AIDS. To make sure your immune system stays healthy, the clinic will want to start OI prophylaxis (treatment to prevent infections) and ART (to fight the virus in your body and strengthen your immune system).

Current government guidelines recommend that treatment be initiated later, when a patient's CD4 count is 200 and below. TAC is campaigning for all people with a CD4 count of 350 and below to be initiated onto ART, as recommended by the World Health Organisation.

It is very important that you join a counselling group to learn about HIV and talk to people who live positively with the disease.

**Encourage others to get tested!**  
**Get treatment early to stay healthy and  
prevent opportunistic infections!**



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