



# HIV, PREGNANCY, & YOUR CHOICES!

A fact sheet for parents to be

If you are a parent to be, you have to consider that you or your partner might have HIV. A pregnant woman can pass HIV to her child before, during or after birth.

If you have HIV there are things you can do to lower the risk of this happening. Clinics across the country offer services to reduce the risk of mothers passing the virus to their children.

This fact sheet will help you understand HIV and pregnancy. It will also help you understand what you can do to protect your health and your child's health.

## AS A PARENT TO BE:

- You can get an HIV test and counselling.
- If you have HIV, you can get medicines to help you live a longer, healthier life.
- You can practice safer sex by always using a condom.
- If you are a pregnant woman:
  - You can choose to keep or terminate your pregnancy.
  - You can go to a public antenatal clinic for regular check-ups.
- If you are a father:
  - You can support your partner and her choices.
  - You can help bring up your child.

## AS A GRAND-PARENT TO BE:

- You can support your son or daughter and his or her choices.
- You can encourage your son or daughter to stay healthy.
- You can learn about HIV.

# WHAT IS AVAILABLE FOR PREGNANT WOMEN WITH HIV?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. There is no need to blame yourself or feel shame if you are infected with HIV. Many pregnant women have HIV. If you know your status you can look after your child's health and your own.

- Your clinic should offer you HIV counselling and testing. It should also provide the medical care that you and your child need.
- You should be given a medicine called AZT from 28 weeks of pregnancy until you give birth. You should also be given a medicine called nevirapine when you go into labour. Your newborn child should get a syrup of nevirapine medicine. This will reduce the risk of passing HIV to your child.
- You can have a test called a CD4 count. This will tell your health worker and you how strong your immune system is.
- If your CD4 count is near or below 200 or if you are sick because of HIV, you should be offered antiretroviral treatment for your own health. This will consist of three antiretroviral medicines (sometimes all in one or two pills) taken everyday for the rest of your life. These medicines will help you live a much longer, healthier life.
- If you do not have enough income, you can get a child support grant for your child once he or she is born.

## IF YOU GO TO CHURCH, YOUR CHURCH SHOULD SUPPORT YOU.

**Reverend Teboho Klaas** of the South African Council of Churches says:

*We have to improve maternal health and prevent mother-to-child transmission. The bible says "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days ..." (Isaiah 65:20 NIV)*

# WHAT IS AVAILABLE FOR YOUR CHILD IF YOU HAVE HIV?

- The clinic should test your baby for HIV when he or she is six weeks old. The clinic should use what is called a PCR test. This will test whether there is HIV in his or her blood.
- Your clinic must provide you with accurate information about how to feed your baby. It is your choice to either give your baby only formula milk or only breast-milk. You should not give both because this increases the chance of your baby getting HIV.
- If you choose to breastfeed:
  - Breastmilk is more nutritious for your child than formula milk, but there is a risk it could infect him or her with HIV.
  - You must feed your baby only breast-milk and not any other foods or liquids until you stop breastfeeding at six months.
  - The clinic should test your baby for HIV again at 18 months.
- If you choose to formula-feed:
  - The clinic should provide you with instructions on how to formula-feed.
  - You should only formula-feed if you can afford it and you can do so safely. Your clinic should provide you with free formula milk for six months.
  - You should take your baby to the clinic if he or she gets diarrhoea.
- If your child has HIV, your clinic should provide him or her with antiretroviral treatment. This can help your child live much longer and have a more normal life.

***The Constitution gives you the right to make decisions about reproduction.***

***It also gives you the right to access reproductive health care services.***

***You can use these rights to make the best decisions for yourself and your child.***