



Every year almost 2 million young people in Africa are infected with HIV and AIDS. There are already more than 5 million South Africans living with the virus that causes AIDS.

Despite what some people think, there is no cure for AIDS. Once you've got it, you've got it for life! (Or death, as the case may be.) So the best cure is prevention.

As a young person, information about the virus is your best friend. You need to know about HIV and AIDS transmission. You should know about testing. And if you are already HIVpositive, learning how to live with HIV - by taking care of yourself, eating the right foods and exercising - is essential.

AIDS is caused by HIV and has many symptoms. It is the name given to the illnesses that weaken the body when HIV is present.

HIV And AIDS: The Facts

A virus is a germ that can cause illness. Many different viruses make people sick and some are more dangerous than others. For example, some viruses just cause colds or mild illness.

The general rule is that once a virus enters your body, your immune system detects it. Your immune system is the mechanism in your body that fights off diseases. Like an army.

But HIV (Human Immuno-deficiency Virus) is a virus that attacks the immune system! So when your body and its army tries to fight back, the virus fights back as well! Because HIV attacks your immune system, your body is weakened and you become sick much faster than other people.

After someone has had HIV for a few years (between 3-10 years) their body becomes tired of fighting off various illnesses. And once their immune system is so low, they have AIDS. AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

There is no cure for AIDS and no way of getting rid of the HI-virus once it is in your body. Luckily, HIV is not a highly contagious (catchy) virus. Unlike the flu and other airborne viruses, it is impossible to catch HIV through casual contact, like a chat with someone or even a hug.

HIV is transmitted only through blood and other bodily fluids like semen, breast milk and vaginal fluids. This means that the main way to get HIV is through sexual contact. But you can also get it by sharing a needle with someone who is infected and mothers can pass it on to their babies before, during or after birth.

You can greatly reduce your risk of contracting the virus by using male or female condoms. Male condoms are almost 100% effective in preventing HIV if they are used correctly (see Sexual Health).

The power to prevent HIV is in your hands:

- Don't share needles.
- Don't have sex until you feel physically and mentally ready.
- If you're already having sex, use a condom each time.

© JumpStart 2007

The publication of JumpStart involves extensive research and substantial costs. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publishers. Any person who carries out any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims.

Disclaimer

Whilst every care has been taken in creating this book, the Publishers do not give any warranty as to the completeness or accuracy of its contents nor of any supplementary information, explanation or opinion. Furthermore, the views expressed in JumpStart are not necessarily those of Deloitte. All advertisements and advertorials have been paid for and therefore do not carry any endorsement by the Publishers or Deloitte.



- Be faithful and honest to one partner.
- And if you've ever had unprotected sex, get yourself tested for HIV.

HIV Testing

1. Know Your Status

If you're having sex, you should know your HIV status to protect yourself and other people. Many people are scared of being tested for HIV because they are afraid of the reactions of their friends, family and community if they test positive.

The person who gives you the test and tells you the results has no right to tell anyone about your HIV status – whether it is negative or positive!

This is a valid concern. There are still many people out there who stigmatise (discriminate against) people living with HIV and AIDS. But you don't have to tell the world your HIV status. In fact, the results of your test are confidential.

But you can ask them to help you to disclose (tell) your status if you want to. Some people have found that it helps to ask their counsellor to help them to disclose to friends and family. You can tell your friends and family when you are ready, and comfortable that they will support you.

There are many people who believe myths (stories) and rumours about AIDS. The truth is, you can't get HIV from a mosquito. You can't get it from sharing food, a toothbrush or a towel. You can't get it from being in the same room with someone. And you can't cure it by having sex with a virgin or baby!

2. Informed Consent

Remember, getting tested is your choice. No one can force you to do it! When you go in for the test, you have to be provided with counselling first and the process has to be explained to you. This is called informed consent.

If there are things you want to get off your chest, talk to the counsellor about them. And remember that the results of your test are confidential. You should notify your partner if you are HIV positive. It'll be hard, yes, but it's the right thing to do.

3. Access To Treatment

Knowing your status enables you to access treatment for opportunistic infections like tuberculosis, pneumonia or diarrhoea. Opportunistic infections take advantage of the fact that your immune system is weak and eventually, one or a combination of these diseases causes death.

Knowing your status also means that you may be eligible for anti-retroviral drugs at clinics and hospitals around the country if you meet certain criteria (conditions). Survivors of sexual assault can get a PEP Kit within 36 hours of being sexually assaulted. This kit can help to reduce their chances of getting HIV. (See Domestic Violence and Rape.)

© JumpStart 2007

The publication of JumpStart involves extensive research and substantial costs. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Publishers. Any person who carries out any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims.

Disclaimer

Whilst every care has been taken in creating this book, the Publishers do not give any warranty as to the completeness or accuracy of its contents nor of any supplementary information, explanation or opinion. Furthermore, the views expressed in JumpStart are not necessarily those of Deloitte. All advertisements and advertorials have been paid for and therefore do not carry any endorsement by the Publishers or Deloitte.