

TAC

TREATMENT ACTION CAMPAIGN

get
tested
for HIV

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It is important to test regularly for HIV (every three to six months) so that you are kept informed of your status.

THERE ARE MANY BENEFITS TO KNOWING YOUR HIV STATUS. KNOWING YOUR HIV STATUS WILL EMPOWER YOU TO:

protect your own health;

protect the health of your sexual partner(s) and

protect your infant's health (if you are a pregnant woman)

You can get tested for free at any government hospital or clinic. Some private facilities and pharmacies also offer free HIV testing.

The test is done by making a small prick on one of your fingers to collect blood to test your HIV status. You should receive your results within a few minutes.

If you test positive, then knowing your status will allow you to get the treatment you need to live a long and healthy life and reduce your risk of transmitting HIV.

If you test negative, then knowing your status will help you make decisions to remain negative. But remember that it takes up to 3 months for an HIV test to show up positive after HIV infection (these 3 months are called the window period). If you test negative but have had vaginal or anal sex without a condom then you must have another test in 3 months.

STAY HEALTHY, GET TREATMENT

If you test HIV positive, the next step that you must take to protect your health is to find out if you are eligible for treatment. This is done by testing your CD4 count.

Your immune system, measured by your CD4 count, helps you fight off infection. If your CD4 count is above 350 then your immune system is strong and you do not have to start HIV treatment yet.

However, your immune system will weaken over time as the HIV multiplies in your body. You will thus need to monitor your CD4 count and when it drops below 350 you will need to start HIV treatment.

DONT DELAY, START TREATMENT AT 350

When your CD4 count is below 350 you will need to start antiretroviral therapy (ART). ART consists of three antiretroviral medicines that you need to take every day for the rest of your life. These three medicines can be taken as three separate tablets or combined into a single tablet that only has to be taken once daily.

TAC is lobbying for all people to have access to single-tablet ART.

While evidence shows that the best time to start ART is when your CD4 count is at or above 350, some people continue to wait before starting ART because they are afraid of the side effects. However, the longer you wait before you start, the worse your health will get and the worse your long-term prospects will be. Note that side effects are no longer the problem they used to be because clinics now offer better ARVs with fewer side effects. New patients and patients who have experienced side effects will be given tenofovir (TDF) instead of stavudine (d4T) or zidovudine (AZT). TDF has fewer side effects than d4T and AZT.

ADHERE TO YOUR TREATMENT

Adherence means taking your medicines at the same time every day. If you adhere to your ART, it will keep you healthy and protect you from opportunistic infections and AIDS-related diseases.

Adhering to your ART treatment will also reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to your sexual partner(s). ART also reduces the risk of pregnant women transmitting HIV to their infants. This is because ART reduces your viral load. Your viral load is the measurement of the amount of virus in your blood, which is one of the most important factors affecting whether or not you will transmit HIV to others.

However, even if you are on ART you should continue to use condoms because they are still the most effective way to prevent onward transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

To help ensure that you take your medicines on time every day, it may be a good idea for you to join a support group or adherence club. You can ask your clinic to refer you to one.

DON'T BE FOOLED BY QUACK TREATMENTS AND IMMUNE BOOSTERS

The only treatment that has been proven to work for HIV is ART. This is not a cure but a lifelong treatment that must be taken every day.

Many people may try to convince you that they have a new 'cure' or 'treatment' for HIV, but they do not have evidence to back up their claims. And while ART is free in the public sector, quacks will usually ask you for lots of money to buy their fake 'treatments' or 'cures'.

Stopping your ART will put your health at risk. Taking an unproven 'treatment' with ART could impact how ART works and harm your health.

In addition, none of the so-called 'immune boosters' that you see advertised on billboards, in newspapers or on display at taxi ranks have been proven to help people with HIV. These products may be called immune boosters, but they don't boost your immune system. All they boost is the bank accounts of the people who sell them.

Know your status
and get the right
treatment to protect
your health!

Adhere to your ART:
take your medicines on
time every day.

Encourage
others to get
tested!



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