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## **DO YOU KNOW YOUR HIV/AIDS STATUS?**

In 2018, statistics showed that approximately 7.7 million people in South Africa were living with HIV. Everyone who is sexually active should have an HIV test at least once in their life.

The earlier you get tested, the sooner you can start taking medication, if you test positive, and the greater your chances of a successful treatment management programme. Read on to find out when and why you should get tested, and if you might require another test in future.

### **WHO SHOULD GET TESTED FOR HIV?**

The Department of Health states that all individuals who are sexually active should be tested at least every 12 months. If you are considered to be more vulnerable to being exposed to HIV, the Department of Health recommends testing every 6–12 weeks. Those considered to be at a higher risk include:

- Individuals who have a known HIV-positive partner
- Individuals who do not know the HIV status of their

- partner
- Persons who inject drugs
- Sex workers
- Men who have sex with men

A retesting recommendation after a negative result is dependent on specific situations, for example recent exposure. If your healthcare professional recommends retesting, you should return within 6–12 weeks of your last appointment.

### **ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS TO FIND OUT WHETHER YOU SHOULD GET TESTED.**

American organisation [HIV.gov](http://HIV.gov) provides the below questions to determine whether you should be tested right now. If you answer 'yes' to one or more, you should schedule an appointment at your nearest clinic or pharmacy:



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- Are you a man who has had sex with another man?
- Have you had sex with an HIV-positive partner?
- Have you had more than one sexual partner?
- Have you injected drugs and shared needles with others?
- Have you exchanged sex for drugs or money?
- Have you been diagnosed with, or sought treatment for, another sexually transmitted disease?
- Have you been diagnosed with or treated for hepatitis or tuberculosis (TB)?
- Have you had sex with someone who could answer 'yes' to any of the above questions or someone whose sexual history you don't know?

**WHAT IF I'M HAVING A BABY – SHOULD PREGNANT WOMEN GET TESTED?**

All pregnant women should be tested for HIV so that they can begin treatment as soon as possible if they receive a positive result. Approximately 4% of pregnant women who test negative in their first test later receive a positive result in the same pregnancy, which highlights the importance of testing at every antenatal appointment. If early treatment occurs, the risk of transmitting the retrovirus to the baby can be very low, at only 1% or less.

**HOW WILL BEING TESTED HELP ME?**

HIV is not a death sentence. Treatment and management of the disease have come a long way in the last few decades and Aids-related deaths have dropped by 50% since 2010, according to UNAIDS. This is precisely why it is important to get tested; for early diagnosis and access to treatment to help you manage your condition as well as prolong your life. With antiretroviral treatment becoming more readily available, you will be able to protect your immune system from further damage if you receive a positive test result.

Being tested also helps you to protect your partner and prevent the spread of HIV/Aids to other people. If you know that you have tested positive, you can take the necessary precautions such as using protection or abstaining from sex.

If you test negative, you can educate yourself on the ideal ways to stay HIV-free and healthy.

**References:**

1. Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation. (n.d.) Available at: <https://desmondtutuhivfoundation.org.za/> [Accessed 10 November 2023]
2. UNAIDS. (n.d.) *Frequently Asked Questions About HIV and AIDS*. [online] Available at: <https://www.unaids.org/en/frequently-asked-questions-about-hiv-andaids#what-is-an-hiv-test> [Accessed 10 November 2023]
3. Fourways Review. (2018). *Five Reasons Why You Should Get Tested This World Aids Day in Diepsloot*. [online] Available at: <https://fourwaysreview.co.za/293296/hivtesting-station-open-in-diepsloot/> [Accessed 10 November 2023]
4. HIV.gov. (2018). *Who Should Get Tested?* [online] Available at: <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/hiv-testing/learn-about-hiv-testing/who-should-get-tested> [Accessed 10 November 2023]

*The information is shared on condition that readers will make their own determination, including seeking advice from a professional. E&OE.*



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