

RESPECT

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THE FACTS ABOUT HIV AND AIDS

What are HIV and AIDS?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that leads to AIDS. HIV weakens your immune system. Your immune system helps your body fight infections and illnesses.

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a term used to describe various types of illnesses that can happen when a person's immune system has been weakened by HIV.

It is important to remember that being infected with HIV is **NOT** a death sentence. People with HIV and AIDS can live long and healthy lives, if they seek treatment and take care of themselves.

What puts me at risk of HIV infection?

- ✓ Being sexually active without using a condom.
- ✓ Having sex with people whose sexual history and HIV status you do not know.
- ✓ If you or your partner have an untreated Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI).
- ✓ Contact with HIV infected blood or bodily fluids

How can I get infected with HIV?

- ✓ The most common way of getting HIV is by having vaginal, oral or anal sex without a condom, with someone who is infected with HIV.
- ✓ Contact with infected blood, through needles, cuts or open wounds.
- ✓ Also a baby can be infected during pregnancy, birth or through breastfeeding.

FACT: HIV is not spread by coughing, hugging, kissing or touching.

Are there any symptoms of HIV?

Not everyone who is HIV positive has symptoms. However, there may or may not be symptoms such as:

- ✓ Weight loss.
- ✓ Diarrhoea (for more than a month)
- ✓ Swollen glands in the neck, armpits and groin.
- ✓ Headache or aching muscles
- ✓ Sores in the mouth that come and go
- ✓ Nausea or vomiting
- ✓ A rash

How can I find out if I have HIV?

You **CANNOT** tell by looking at someone if they are HIV-positive. In fact, most people who are infected with HIV do not even know they have it! It can take several years for the signs of HIV infection to appear. The **ONLY** way to find out your HIV status (whether you are positive or negative) is by getting **TESTED**. You can get tested by visiting your health care provider, or by visiting a VCT centre.

Is there a cure for HIV and AIDS?

There is NO cure for HIV and AIDS. However, people living with HIV and AIDS can live long and healthy lives. If you are HIV positive the key is to take charge of your health. If you do have AIDS, medicine called ARV (Anti- Retro Viral therapy) is available in Lesotho.

What is ARV?

Anti-Retro Viral therapy is a combination of medicines that can stop HIV from multiplying in your body and stop your immune system from getting weaker. **It does not cure AIDS or HIV** but it does help people with AIDS to live longer and to improve their quality of life. If you want to find out more about ARV, visit your nearest New Start Centre Clinic or talk to your doctor.

What is re-infection?

Re-infection occurs when a person living with HIV gets infected a second time while having unprotected sex with another HIV infected person. Re-infection can make the HIV more severe. If you and your partner are both HIV positive you should always use a condom when having sex as this will protect both you and your partner from re-infection.

I am pregnant and HIV positive. What is going to happen to my baby?

A woman who is infected with HIV could pass the virus on to her baby during pregnancy, birth and / or breastfeeding. Only by knowing her HIV status can a pregnant woman make appropriate decisions about maintaining her and her baby's health. There are many options of preventing transmitting HIV to your child. Talk to your health care provider or counsellor.

FACTS: Anyone can get HIV; everyone can prevent it!!