

# RESPECT

Love. Life. Others.



## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM COUNSELLING AND TESTING

As we know, HIV requires serious consideration.

Are you aware of what you can do to reduce your risk of getting infected with HIV?

Have you ever thought of talking to someone about HIV or getting tested for it?

Knowing whether you have HIV or not is your first step towards a confident future. But making the decision to seek counselling and testing for HIV may not be easy. You may be wondering:

- ✓ How would it help me to know if I'm infected or not?
- ✓ What would I do if I found out I was infected with HIV?
- ✓ If I am positive, what will I tell my partner and family?
- ✓ If I am negative, what should I do to remain negative in the future?
- ✓ What do I need to do to get tested? Where do I go?

*"I was so relieved when my counsellor told me my results were negative. Not that I know, I can plan my future. I also know what I can do to avoid getting infected with HIV. At first, I was scared about getting tested. Now I realise that by getting counselled and tested, I have another chance to make a new start in keeping myself free of HIV."*

*- 21 year old*

*"I was shocked and numb when I found out I was positive. Why me? I have had good days and bad days since finding out. My counsellor said that would be normal. But I am glad I found out because I can plan my future. I have learned what I should do to protect myself and those I love. I am careful about eating well and resting when I need to. I also use condoms every time to avoid getting re-infected or infecting my partner".*

*- 28 year old*

### **Why should I go for counselling and testing?**

Quite simply, you could have been exposed to the HIV virus without knowing

it. For instance, if you have had sex with someone without using condoms, then you have put yourself at risk of HIV infection. It does not matter if the person looks healthy. Many people who are infected with HIV do not know it. Neither do their sex partners. The best way to know whether you are infected or not is to be counselled and tested for HIV. If a couple plans to have a child, counselling and testing is even more important. The virus can be passed to their baby during pregnancy, delivery or breast-feeding.

*"I never would have imagined that my boyfriend was infected with HIV - he looks so strong and healthy! But he got tested when he found out that one of his former girlfriends was positive. He was positive too. Now I have decided to get tested - it is important for me to know what to expect of my future."  
- 25 year old*

## **Different people have different reasons for getting tested**

Some of the reasons below may apply to you:

- ✓ "Knowing one way or the other would give me peace of mind"
- ✓ "I am entering into a new relationship and want to know my HIV status and the HIV status of my partner."
- ✓ "I decided that just knowing whether I was positive or negative would make it easier to plan my future."
- ✓ "We want to have another baby, so we want to make sure that we are not infected."
- ✓ "I want to protect my partner. Whether I am infected or not, I want to know what I can do to avoid infecting myself and my partner."
- ✓ "I want to protect myself for the future. If I am negative, then I will make sure I do not put myself at risk of being infected."
- ✓ "I am already infected with the HIV virus. But, I found out that I can be re-infected by having sex without a condom. Every time I get infected again, my health will be affected. I want to talk to someone about what I can do to prevent getting infected again."

## **What should I do if I decide to get HIV counselling and testing?**

Once you have decided to seek HIV counselling or testing or both, you should visit a Voluntary Counselling and Testing (**VCT**) centre.

## **What will happen when I go for counselling and testing?**

### **1) Arriving at the New Start Centre**

When you enter the New Start Centre, the receptionist will welcome you. He or she will give you some reading materials on health. Don't worry, your privacy is protected as your name is not requested. A small fee may be charged. The receptionist will take you into a private room where you can talk to a trained and caring counsellor about HIV.

## **2) Meeting the Counsellor**

You will talk to a trained counsellor about questions you may have concerning HIV AIDS. Your counsellor will talk to you individually in total privacy and will discuss ways to reduce your risk of getting the HIV virus. The counsellor will also be available to talk to you in the future, should you decide to return for a follow-up visit.

## **3) Taking the HIV test (if you wish to)**

If you decide to take the HIV test after talking to the counsellor, he or she can arrange for you to be tested immediately. The test is quick and simple. A small amount of blood will be taken for testing. With rapid testing, you get your results within an hour. (In rare instances it can take 1-2 weeks to get the test results. In such cases, the counsellor will inform you about a suitable date for you to return for your test results). Please remember that the test is completely confidential.

## **4) What happens after being tested?**

Once the test result is available, your counsellor will discuss it with you and provide counselling according to your needs. The counsellor will discuss the meaning of your results and answer any questions you may have. Your counsellor can also refer you to other organizations for further support. You will also be given a pamphlet called "What do your results mean for your future?"

## **In the meantime, remember these THREE important messages:**

- 1) Abstain from sex. If you are young, consider waiting to have sex until later.
- 2) Be faithful to one uninfected partner. You can only tell if your partner is HIV free after they have been tested. If you have any doubts, it is always safer to use male or female condoms.
- 3) Use condoms correctly every time you have sex. Ask your counsellor for information on how to use male or female condoms correctly.