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Introduction

HIV/AIDS was first identified in the early 1980's. Since then the number of people infected with HIV has increased rapidly throughout the world. HIV/AIDS has become the most widely talked about condition in history. However, each day more and more people are becoming infected.

We do not use what we know is right to protect ourselves from infection with the virus. To make matters worse, many people are infected with HIV, yet do not have an HIV test to find out their status so they can get help and support.

The key is information and action. The first step is to find out whether you are living with HIV or not. If you are living with HIV, you can get information about how to stay healthy as well as how to protect yourself and your loved ones. If you are not living with HIV, you can get information about how to remain that way.

There are many wrong ideas about HIV/AIDS. Many individuals believe HIV does not exist, condoms do not work, that only certain people are at risk of HIV infection, that HIV cannot be treated, that there is a cure or that you can become infected through food, water, toilets, showers and pools etc. This booklet aims to help you understand HIV/AIDS more clearly by answering some of the questions that you may have and provide you with information on HIV/AIDS as well as the Aid for AIDS programme that is available to members living with HIV of contracted medical schemes and companies.

If left untreated, HIV can progress to a serious, disabling disease, however today there are many treatments available to ensure a long and healthy life. HIV/AIDS can be treated and there is a lot that can be done to improve you health if diagnosed early. Medications can reduce the virus while vitamins, good nutrition, and exercise can play a critical role in keeping your body strong and healthy.



What is HIV & AIDS?

What is HIV?

HIV (Human Immuno Deficiency Virus) is a virus that enters blood. In HIV positive people, the virus can be found in the blood, sex fluids (such as sperm and vaginal fluids) and breast milk. HIV is too small to see with the eye.

What does HIV do?

HIV attacks and eventually destroys the body's immune system. The immune system is like your body's army. It normally fights germs, infections, bacteria and viruses that would make you sick. The body cannot defend itself against germs, infections, bacteria and viruses when this "army" gets weak.

What is AIDS?

HIV causes AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome). HIV slowly damages the immune system (the army) if it gets into a person's body. This means that the body starts to lose its ability to defend itself against germs, infections and bacteria such as TB.

When the immune system is weak, you are susceptible to certain illnesses like

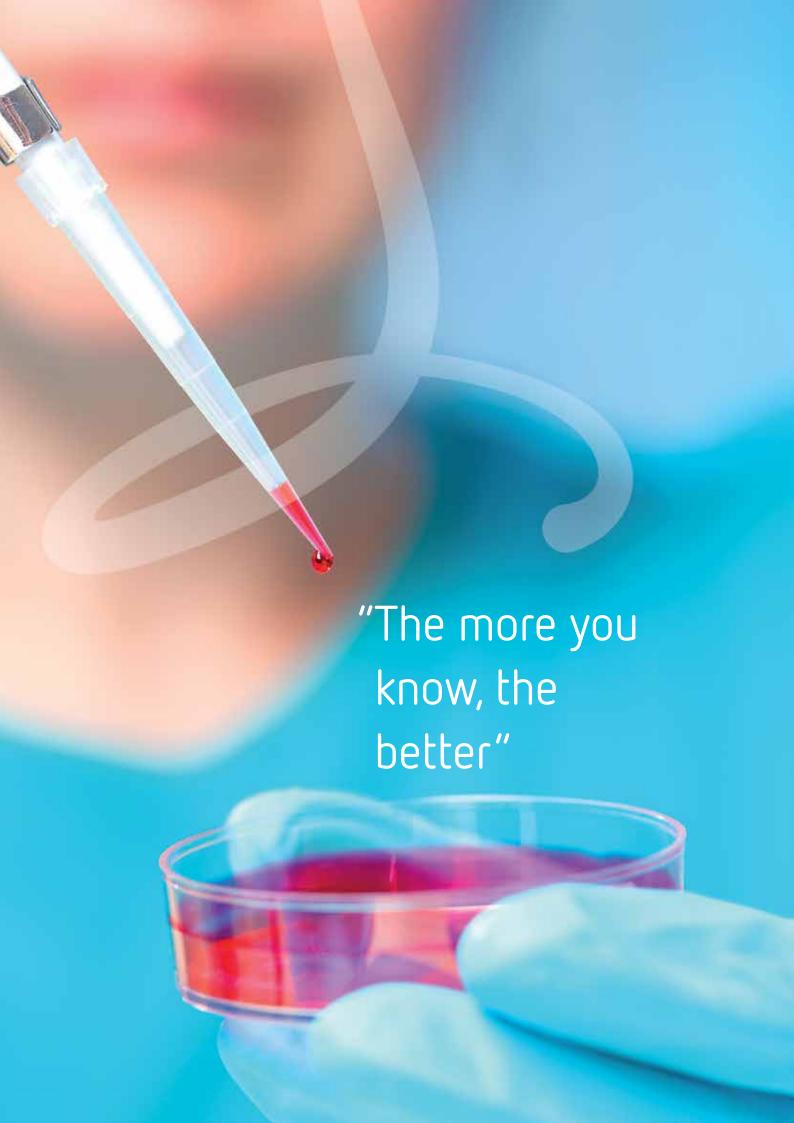
pneumonia and TB. This process may take many years to happen. You are then said to have AIDS. A person gets sick when HIV has destroyed most of his/her immune system. This can take many years to happen.

Many people believe that HIV/AIDS is not real. They think that it is a story to scare people to use condoms and stop having sex. However, many people have HIV in their bodies and many have already died of an AIDS-related sickness.

What will AIDS do?

A person living with AIDS becomes very weak and can get sick from many different germs. These germs can cause problems such as losing weight, bad diarrhoea, sores in the mouth, cough, pneumonia, TB, brain and nerve disease, swellings, fevers and sores. These do not get better on their own because of a deficiency in the immune system. Taking medication can help you to become better.

"Find out about medication to treat HIV"



How is HIV spread?

HIV is spread in the following ways:

1. Sexual intercourse

HIV can be found in the semen and vaginal fluids of a person who is HIV positive. He or she can pass HIV onto another person through unprotected sex (not using a condom) vaginal, oral or anal sex.

2. Pregnancy

HIV may be passed onto a baby from an HIV positive mother. Not all HIV positive mothers give birth to babies that are HIV positive. The risk of passing on HIV to the babies increases if the mother is sick with an AIDS illness or if the mother gets infected with HIV during pregnancy.

HIV can be passed to the baby during:

- The pregnancy
- · At the time of delivery
- In breast milk

Many women only find out they have HIV when they fall pregnant. By this time the unborn child is at risk of getting HIV. The chances of HIV passing from mother to child are between 20 and 40% during pregnancy and at the time of delivery. The risk of infection increases if the mother breast feeds. There are now medicines available to help reduce the spread of HIV to the baby.

3. Blood

HIV can pass from one person to another through his or her blood. Sometimes sick

people are given extra blood through a blood transfusion. In South Africa blood transfusions are safe because blood is tested before it is given to sick people.

HIV can be passed on in very small amounts of blood, for example when people share razor blades which are not cleaned properly.

HIV can also be passed on by injecting drugs and sharing needles.

People most at risk of this happening are:

- Injecting drug users
- · Doctors and nurses treating patients with HIV

HIV can also be passed on when handling blood without gloves, e.g. after an accident, as this blood may contain the HIV germ that could enter through cuts and open wounds.

"Speak to Aid for AIDS or your local health worker"

Are there any other ways I can get HIV?

HIV is mainly spread through unprotected blood and receiving blood infected with the virus. It can also be spread during pregnancy, birth and breast-feeding.



Doctors agree that you cannot get HIV from:

- Eating food prepared by someone with HIV
- Sharing cups, mugs, plates, food, spoons, forks, etc
- · Doorhandles or rails
- Sneezing or coughing
- Tears or saliva
- Toilet seats
- Holding or shaking hands
- Mosquitoes
- Swimming pools or baths
- Working or attending school with someone who is HIV positive
- Donating blood
- · Living with someone who has HIV
- Being next to or close to someone who has HIV

Who can become infected?

Some people think that HIV/AIDS is a disease that only affects certain people. HIV/AIDS affects everyone, no matter what age group, race, gender, religion, faith, culture, nationality or sexuality. If you have been exposed to HIV, there is a chance that you have become infected.

"The only way to know if you have HIV is to have an HIV test"







Symptoms of HIV infection

What are the symptoms of HIV infection?

Within a month or two of getting infected with HIV, many people (but not all) can develop flu-like symptoms, swollen glands or a rash. These symptoms usually go away within a couple of weeks, and a person can look and feel well for many years before the symptoms come back.

This period when you look and feel well can last five to seven years or longer in adults and two to five years or longer in children born with HIV. As HIV continues to attack the immune system, the illnesses start to show again.

What will happen when someone with HIV gets sick?

It can take many years for HIV to make you sick. When you start to feel sick because of serious infections, it means that you may have AIDS.

Some early signs include: painful skin rashes (shingles), sores on the lips which do not heal,

thrush (a white rash inside the mouth or on the private parts), swelling in the neck, behind the ear, under the arm and in the groin.

Signs and symptoms of TB include coughs, sweating and weight loss, fevers and sweating at night, as well as enlarged glands.

"The sooner you are tested, the better"

Later signs of AIDS

You can also develop any of the following problems when you get very sick with AIDS: TB, bad cough and fever (pneumonia), 'pins and needles' and pains in the hands and feet, diarrhoea that does not stop, weakness and tiredness, tumours on the skin, losing weight, headaches, seizure, black-outs, loss of memory, difficulty in concentrating and difficulty in swallowing.

Testing for HIV

How will I know that I have HIV?

You can look and feel healthy for years when you first have HIV in your body. There is only one way to find out whether you are living with HIV - by having an HIV test.

Should I have an HIV test?

Finding out as early as possible after being infected with HIV is important. This way you can get help and avoid spreading HIV without knowing it.

Why must I have an HIV test?

- Knowing the result can reduce the stress and uncertainty of not knowing.
- Your doctor or clinic will be able to tell you if worrying signs and symptoms are HIV/AIDS-related.
- There is help available to you if you are HIV positive, one being through Aid for AIDS. Contact them on 0860 100 646 for more information.
- You cannot lose your job just because you are HIV positive – there are laws to protect you.
- You can change your lifestyle to protect sexual partners from future infections, so that you do not infect your sexual partner with the virus without knowing.
- Decisions about having children or entering into new relationships can be considered.
- A lot can be done to help you lead a healthy, normal life and slow down the time to developing AIDS if HIV is found early (before getting sick) in your blood.
- If you are HIV positive and register with Aid for AIDS, approval can be provided for multivitamins and preventative vaccinations to help you remain healthy.

How do I have an HIV test?

You should go to a clinic if you are thinking about having an HIV test. The health worker should sit down and talk to you about the test. You can decide whether or not to have the test. No one can force you to have an HIV test — it is your choice.

If you decide to test, the health worker will take a blood or saliva (spit) sample. This will be checked for HIV antibodies, which are made by the immune system soon after you are infected.

Some of the tests will give the results within a few minutes, but other tests need to be sent away to get the results. If your test has been sent away you will need to visit the health worker about one week later to get the result. If antibodies are found you have a 'positive test' and are infected with HIV.

This is why people living with HIV are often called 'HIV positive'.

What are my rights?

You have to decide whether to go for the test. Nobody, not even a doctor or your employer, has the right to force you to have the test without your permission. The test result is confidential. It is against the law for the health worker to tell someone else the result without your permission. It is important that the health worker explains the meaning of the test to you so you can decide if you want it.

"Aid for AIDS can help you lead a healthy, normal life"



Should I have counselling when going for an HIV test?

Taking an HIV test is very personal and the test result can be difficult to handle. It is important to get counselling to prepare yourself for the test result. Try a local counselling centre, or your local ATICC (AIDS Training, Information and Counselling Centre), if you do not know where to find one.

The Aid for AIDS number is 0860 100 646 and all calls are confidential.

What if my HIV test is positive?

- · You are infected with HIV.
- You can spread it to your sexual partners if you have unsafe sex.
- You must always use a condom if you have sex.
- It is important to tell sexual partners that you are HIV positive. Discuss this with a counsellor or health worker.
- · You must not donate blood.

Pregnant women who are HIV positive may infect their babies. Not all babies will be

infected with HIV. HIV can also be passed on during breast-feeding.

The test cannot tell when you got the infection or when you will get sick.

What if the HIV test is negative?

- · No HIV has been detected in your blood.
- You may not have HIV if the test is negative.

However, it may be necessary to test again. You could be in the 'window period', which is the time between when you are infected with HIV and the tests used by doctors and clinics become positive. This is usually two to four weeks.

"If you are HIV negative, keep yourself safe from HIV in the future. The key is to stay negative!"

Preventing the spread of HIV

How do I stop myself from being infected with HIV?

"There is no cure for HIV. Once a person has HIV, they will remain infected for the rest of their life. Therefore preventing the spread is the most important way of controlling HIV."

The following actions will prevent the spread of HIV:

- Protected sex with a condom, used correctly
- Sex without penetration this is when a man's penis does not enter
 the woman's vagina or anus. This is also safe sex. Sex can be a way
 of showing love but not the only way. You can also show love by
 kissing, touching and holding each other.
- You can have sexual climax without penetration by rubbing the person's private parts with hands or fingers.
- · It is important to reduce the number of different sexual partners.
- New relationships you should use a condom. Both of you should go for an HIV test before you stop using condoms. It is safe to have sex without protection if both HIV tests are negative. This means you are both free of HIV.
- Remember that both partners must stay in a sexually faithful relationship with only each other, otherwise the sex will no longer be safe. This is a faithful relationship.

Sexually transmitted infections

How do I get my partner to agree to have protected sex?

One of the reasons why HIV is spreading so fast is that many people do not want to talk about sex. The key here is communication. You should have open discussions about having an HIV test, using condoms, being faithful and the dangers of unsafe sex. Discussion about sex and relationships with your partner needs to happen if you are going to protect yourself from HIV.

If you are unsure of how to deal with this, contact the National AIDS Helpline, your local ATICC (AIDS, Training, Information and Counselling Centre) or Aid for AIDS.

"Have open talks with your partner"

I've heard that Sexually Transmitted Infections can increase the chance of infection?

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are any sickness passed on from one person to another during sex. Gonorrhoea, the drop, syphilis and herpes are STIs.

A person with an STI may have a discharge or sores on his or her private parts. This makes it easier for the HIV to get into blood and the body during sex.

STIs can be very dangerous and can cause bad infections and HIV can get into your body and blood more easily through broken skin if you already have an STI. This means that HIV can be spread from one person to another more easily.

How do I know if I have a Sexually Transmitted Infection?

You may have the following problems:

- Sores on your genitals or anus
- White, yellow or green discharge from you penis or vagina
- Pain in the lower stomach
- Burning or pain when going to the toilet
- Itching or redness around the private parts
- Painful sex
- Pain in the testicles
- Swelling in the groin

It is important that you have an STI treated. Clinics and doctors can treat STIs with tablets or with an injection. Treatment of STIs usually works quickly.

"STIs are passed on during unprotected sex"

Condoms

"Condoms are the most important way of preventing the spread of HIV"

The correct method of using a male condom:

- · Use a new condom every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- · Before using the condom make sure it has not expired and that it is not damaged.
- Handle the condom carefully. Don't tear it with your finger nails or teeth.
- Unroll the condom a little on your finger to see which way it will unroll.
- · Before sex begins, put a condom onto your hard penis. Pull the foreskin down first if you are not circumcised.
- · Before putting on the condom, squeeze the tip so no air is trapped.
- Roll the condom down over your penis so that the whole penis is covered with the condom.

- · Use water-based lubricants only (e.g. KY jelly) as oil-based lubricants, like Vaseline petroleum jelly, will weaken the condom.
- · After sex, pull the penis out of your partner before it gets soft. Hold the bottom of the condom tightly so that it doesn't slip off.
- Carefully take the condom off your penis Be careful not to let any fluid leak from the condom.
- · Tie the condom and throw it away. Put it inside some paper first, if you can.
- Do not wash or reuse the condom.
- If the condom breaks during sex, withdraw the penis immediately.









Squeeze condom tip



Unroll fully



Hold base when withdrawing

Facts about condoms

Don't use things like plastic bags if you can't get a condom. They are dangerous.

Only use one condom at a time otherwise they will both rip.

Condoms are one of the most important ways to prevent the spread of HIV, if used correctly.

The condom may fail in preventing STI and HIV transmission if:

- It is torn
- It slips off during sexual contact
- · It is not put onto the penis correctly, or it is not put on before sexual contact begins

Both male and female condoms (femidoms) are available.

Living with HIV/AIDS



"Stay healthy!"

I have heard that you cannot treat people who have HIV or AIDS? What should I do to stay healthy if I am HIV positive?

Although there is no cure for HIV, there is a lot that can be done to lead a healthy and 'normal' life. Good medical care and hygiene can do a lot to keep people well for a long time and lengthen the time before you get sick and develop AIDS.

- Register on the Aid for AIDS programme if you are a member of a contracted medical scheme or company (they are there to assist you). Contact the programme on 0860 100 646.
- Stay working and active for as long as possible.
- Have protected or safe sex (correctly using a condom).
- Visit the doctor or hospital for regular check ups.
- Eat good food and stay strong for as long as possible.

Improve your lifestyle by keeping healthy, including:

- · Exercise regularly.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet (vegetables, beans, eggs and fruit).
- Stop smoking and avoid alcohol. (These things make your body weak so it is easier for HIV to get strong and you to get AIDS earlier.)
- Medication can help slow down HIV, the disease and to prevent illnesses.
- · Get enough rest and reduce stress levels.
- Take multivitamins.
- · Drink lots of water.

HIV medicines/Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)

What medicines can I take to prevent illnesses?

Medicines can be used to prevent illnesses that you can get when you have HIV. These medicines are known as vaccinations and prophylaxis (prevention). It is important that you see your doctor regularly so illnesses can be found and treated.

What about medicines to attack the virus?

New medicines can help slow down the disease. These medicines are called 'antiretrovirals' and, if taken correctly, can reduce the amount of HIV in the blood. When several of these drugs are used together, they are more effective and allow the immune system to heal. This means it will take longer for a person with HIV to get AIDS and will help keep them out of hospital.

Although there is no cure for HIV, there are medicines available that treat HIV very effectively. There are other illnesses which can also be treated and not cured, like sugar diabetes or high blood pressure. HIV should be seen as another chronic treatable illness.

It is not necessary to start taking HIV medicines as soon as you find out that you are HIV positive. A lot of people with HIV remain healthy and well for a long time without treatment.

When HIV gets into your body, it attacks your immune system. The immune system will become weaker and weaker and eventually won't be able to fight off any other infections. It can take a number of years before the immune system is this weak.

CD4 counts and viral loads

Your doctor will measure your CD4 count (the health of your immune system) and viral load (the amount of virus in your blood) to determine the stage of the disease which you are at and to help decide on the best time to start treatment. Once your immune system is weak or if you are having serious symptoms, it is necessary to start taking HIV medicines.

Antiretrovirals

The medicines which are used to treat HIV are called antiretrovirals (ART). There are three different classes of antiretroviral medicines. Your doctor will usually use three medicines from two different classes to treat your HIV. The medicines do not get rid of HIV, but they lower the amount of HIV in your blood and the HIV is therefore not able to do as much damage to the immune system.

Antiretroviral therapy has the following benefits:

- The medicines will increase the length of your life.
- The medicines will improve the quality of your life.
- The medicines will reduce the chance of you getting nasty infections because your immune system is too weak too fight off the infections.
- The medicines will boost your CD4 count and make your immune system stronger.
- The medicines will reduce your viral load.
 Less virus in the blood means less damage to the immune system.

"Once you are on antiretroviral medicines, your doctor will do blood tests to make sure that the medicines are boosting the CD4 count and decreasing the viral load. It is very important to go back to your doctor for these tests"

Taking your medicines correctly

For antiretrovirals to work properly it is very important that they are taken correctly. You must remember to take every dose of your medicines every day. If you miss medicines, the HIV will become resistant to that medicine and your treatment will have to be changed. (Drug resistance can occur if you don't take your medicines properly, they will work less well against your virus). As there are several different classes of antiretrovirals, it is possible to change a few medicines, but

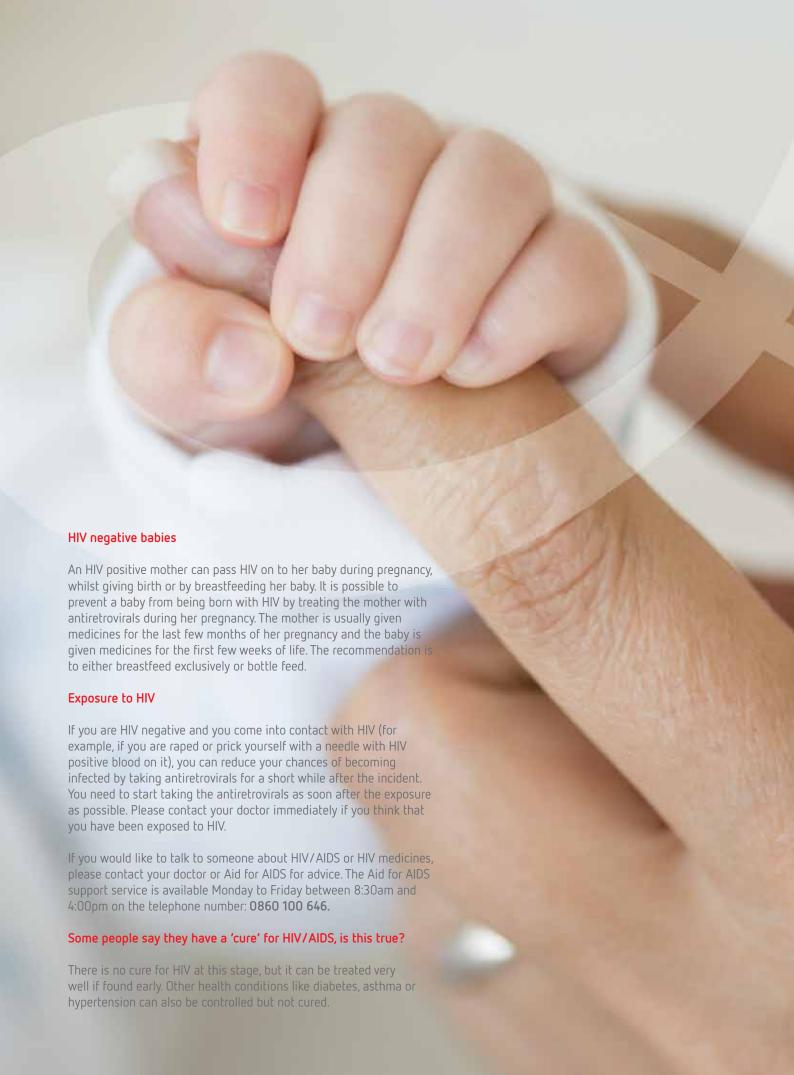
treatment can become difficult if the patient is resistant to a lot of different medicines. You therefore need to aim to take your medicines exactly as prescribed by your doctor. Starting antiretroviral treatment is a big decision and does require a lot of commitment. If you are not sure that you are ready to cope with treatment, you should discuss this openly with your doctor as it may be better to wait a little longer before starting treatment.

Changing medicines

It is sometimes necessary to make changes to your treatment. Some of the antiretrovirals may not 'agree' with you and you may experience side effects. If any of your medicines are making you feel unwell, you should discuss this with your doctor. If the side effect is not too severe, your doctor may encourage you to continue taking the medicines. The side effect may get better (or disappear altogether) after you have been on the medicine for a little while. In some cases it may be necessary for your doctor to change you to a different antiretroviral because of side effects.

Your doctor will also do certain blood tests to check if the medicines are having any bad effects on your body. Your doctor will tell you when to come back for blood tests. It is very important to go back to your doctor regularly for these tests so that any side effects can be picked up quickly. It may also become necessary to change your medicines because the HIV has become resistant to the medicines (this can happen even if you are taking the medicines correctly). Your doctor will then change all of your medicine.





The Aid for AIDS programme

What is available to me through my medical scheme or company programme?

It is important that you take your medicines regularly and do not skip doses. Some people feel ill when they first start taking the medicines, BUT THIS WILL GET BETTER as your body gets stronger.

Once you start these medicines, you will take them for the rest of your life. However, your Antiretroviral therapy (ART) may be changed or temporarily stopped due to side effects or possible failure of the medicines. The use of ART in the case of mother to child transmission and in the case of rape and occupational exposure is short term.

Antiretroviral medicines may be given to pregnant women who are HIV positive, and to their baby after birth. This is to prevent the baby from getting HIV.

HIV positive members of contracted medical schemes and companies are able to access these medicines through the Aid for AIDS programme.

For further information, please contact Aid for AIDS on 0.860 100 646

Aid for AIDS is available to members of contracted medical schemes and companies and offers members and dependants access to:

- Medicines to treat HIV, including
 Antiretroviral therapy (including drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission and after rape or needlestick injury) and multivitamins.
- Treatment to prevent opportunistic infections like certain serious pneumonias and TB.
- Regular monitoring of disease progression and response to therapy.
- Ongoing patient support via a Treatmen Support Line.
- Clinical guidelines and telephonic support for providers.
- Assistance in finding a registered counsellor for emotional support.

The Aid for AIDS programme

What does Aid for AIDS offer me if I register?

A lot of progress has been made in HIV/AIDS treatment. The earlier a person knows they have HIV, the sooner they can get help. By joining Aid for AIDS, members will benefit from:

Medication

Aid for AIDS authorises payment of Antiretroviral drugs (HIV/AIDS drugs) and other medicines to treat HIV/AIDS. If members are HIV positive and register on Aid for AIDS, approval can also be provided for multivitamins. All medical schemes give an extra amount, in addition to the usual medicine benefits, to cover these drugs. However, patients must register on Aid for AIDS to access this benefit

Regular examinations and tests

Aid for AIDS reminds the patient to go for regular examinations and tests. This helps their doctor monitor their health. If changes to treatment are needed, the patient's doctor can simply contact Aid for AIDS for any necessary authorisation.

See your doctor regularly

Vaccinations

Aid for AIDS authorises payment of vaccinations to protect against illnesses like flu. These illnesses affect people with HIV far more badly than a person who is healthy, especially if their immune system is very weak. Remember that HIV breaks down the immune system over time.

Counselling

Patients need help to deal with emotions and difficulties that come from being infected and living with HIV. Aid for AIDS therefore advises patients and their families to seek support from a registered counsellor who can help them cope. Aid for AIDS has a list of various counsellors and support groups in South Africa, and will gladly provide this information to its members.

Ongoing monitoring and personal support

The Aid for AIDS team is specially trained and will work with the patient's doctor to ensure the most appropriate and cost — effective treatment Clinical guidelines and ongoing support are also available for providers on request.

"Get help as soon as you can"

Patients also have access to a Treatment Support Line, 0860 100 646, for help with:

Administrative queries — how to obtain and complete application forms, as well as claiming procedures and benefit information. Clinical queries — questions about HIV-related illnesses, drugs and special investigations. Clinics and support services — advice on clinics and available support groups.

How do I join Aid for AIDS?

Step One

If you are worried that you might be infected with HIV, ask your doctor or clinic to test you. This test will be paid for and only you and your doctor will be informed of the results.

Step Two

If the results show that you are HIV-positive, call AfA on 0860 100 646 and ask for an application form.

Step Three

Your doctor will examine you and help complete the form. Your doctor will be paid for completing the form.

Step Four

Fax your completed form to AfA on our toll-free number: 0800 600 773

Step Five

The AfA medical team is specially trained to review your medical details. They will contact your doctor if necessary, and agree on the most appropriate treatment for you.

Step Six

You will need to visit your doctor for regular examinations and tests.

Step Seven

Your doctor will contact AfA to keep us informed about your condition. If necessary, your treatment plan will be updated.

Step Eight

If you are a medical aid member, submit your HIV claims in the same manner as you would do for all other claims. Alternatively, claims for company funded programmes should be submitted to AfA at: PO Box 38597, Pinelands, 7430.

What is the benefit amount that is available if I register on Aid for AIDS?

In a case where the member or dependant has been raped or accidentally exposed to blood, the member must see his or her doctor immediately. The doctor will phone Aid for AIDS to request that a PEP (post exposure prophylaxis) form be faxed to him/her. The form must be completed and faxed back to Aid for AIDS as soon as possible

Please note that PEP must be started immediately after the exposure or within 72 hours. The doctor can give a starter pack if the incident happened after hours or over a weekend.

Contact details

What does Aid for AIDS do to maintain confidentiality?

Every care has been taken to maintain patient confidentiality. The doctors, pharmacists and nurses in Aid for AIDS have all signed confidentiality agreements. They work in a confidential unit with separate telephone, fax and private mailbag facilities.

However, each time an Aid for AIDS member sees a different doctor, the number of people who are aware of their condition increases, and confidentiality of their status decreases. Patients are encouraged to stay with one doctor, who will get to know them.

www.aidforaids.co.za www.aidforaids.mobi

Tel: 0860 100 646 | Fax: 0800 600 773 Email: afa@afadm.co.za P.O. Box 38597, Pinelands, 7430

How do I contact Aid for AIDS?

If you have more questions, you can contact Aid for AIDS in confidence on 0860 100 646, where they can answer your questions and offer advice and guidelines.

Alternatively, you can send us a "please call me sms" on 083 410 9078 or email afa@afadm.co.za

Alternatively, you can contact the National AIDS Helpline on 0800 012 322.





Disclaimer: It is not possible in a small brochure like this to give you all the answers you may need. The purpose of the brochure is just to give you some ideas. If you need more information, speak to the Aid for AIDS programme, your doctor or health worker. Aid for AIDS cannot be held responsible for any medical problems.

Call Aid for AIDS or

0860 100 646