

TAKE ACTION TO STOP HIV & AIDS



THE CHALLENGE

South Africa accounts for a third of all new HIV infections in Southern Africa¹.

With 7.2 million people living with HIV at the end of 2017, South Africa has the largest number of people living with HIV and AIDS of any country in the world². We also have one of the highest levels of domestic violence and rape - the Medical Research Council found that every eight hours, a woman in South Africa is killed by her intimate partner³. This is the highest rate recorded anywhere in the world.

This violence reflects the unequal power that exists between men and women. It is also one of the root causes of the rapid spread of HIV in South Africa. Almost one-third of sexually active women reported that their first sexual encounter was coerced. As a result, young women in South Africa are much more likely to be infected than men.



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1



KNOW YOUR STATUS

If you are sexually active, the only way to know your status is to be tested.

According to the Charter of Rights on AIDS and HIV, you have a right to anonymous, confidential HIV testing. Many people, especially many men, are afraid to test. They are afraid of knowing their status, and they are afraid of being stigmatised by their colleagues, friends and family. But it is only by getting tested that you can begin to make decisions about your life and the people you care about based on facts, and most people find love and support when they disclose their HIV-positive status. Besides, to combat HIV and AIDS we must challenge and eradicate stigma – not fear it. Ubuntu does not tolerate stigma!

HIV is a lifelong and life-threatening illness, but it does not have to be a death sentence! Like diabetes and high blood pressure, it is a chronic illness that can be managed.

Some men refuse to get tested based on the mistaken belief that they are somehow “safe” from infection, or that to know their status can spoil their fun. If you have ever had unprotected sex, you are not safe! And certainly you can still have fun, knowing your status and protecting both yourself and your partner.

The good news is that thanks to nationwide testing initiatives, more than 10 million people in South Africa test for HIV every year!⁵



2

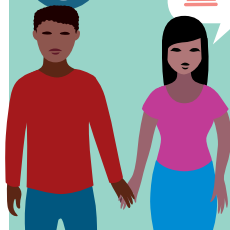


EDUCATE YOURSELF

Before getting tested, educate yourself on HIV and AIDS, and learn what resources are available in your area. Pamphlets and other literature can usually be obtained from **clinics, hospitals, NGOs, churches and municipalities.**

*If you want to know more about HIV or AIDS, testing, counselling or treatment, feel free to **contact Sonke Gender Justice, or any of the numbers listed on the back.***

3



PROTECT YOURSELF & OTHERS

Whether you have tested positive or negative, you still need to practice safe sex. If you are positive, you must be very careful not to be exposed to other strains of the virus that can make you more sick. If you test negative – you will want to stay that way! Here are some tips for protecting yourself and others:

- **ALWAYS use condoms!** They have proved to be the most effective barrier available against HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) at the moment. Have you tried female condoms with your partner yet? If not, ask for some from your nearest clinic, and if they don't have any, insist that they order some. Although they can be difficult to use when you first try, don't give up because they can be most enjoyable for both of you! Using either a male or female condom can also encourage open discussion with your partner about sex, which can lead to a more exciting, fun and fulfilling relationship.

There are a lot of myths about condoms which are causing HIV and AIDS to spread even faster. Most of these myths simply serve as an excuse not to wear one! Condoms are by far the safest way to protect ourselves available at the moment – unless abstinence is an option for you. But of course, condoms will only work if you use them properly and every time!

- ***Reduce the number of sexual partners you have.***

The virus is most easily passed along soon after a person has become infected, so people with multiple partners spread the virus to all of them quickly – and those partners then quickly pass on the virus to others.

*Having more than one sexual partner puts you at **VERY high risk of being infected with HIV.***

- ***Be responsible about your relationships.*** Avoid “one-night stands” – they are not worth the risk. Always get to know someone well and get tested before starting a new sexual relationship. Space your relationships and avoid having overlapping or consecutive sexual partnerships. All of these will help you to stay healthy – and happy!

- ***Reduce your alcohol consumption.*** You know that alcohol encourages you to take risks. Is it worth your life?

- ***Consider getting circumcised.*** Recent studies have shown that men who are circumcised have some protection against HIV infection. Not enough to stop wearing condoms, however, so condoms must still be used. If you have not been circumcised, we recommend you consider being circumcised at your local clinic or hospital. Remember, it is not a guarantee that you will not become infected.

*SO: if you are empowered, well-informed on HIV and AIDS, always use condoms, stick to one sexual partner and get tested regularly, **THEN** you can say you are **SAFE!***

- ***If you are HIV-positive.*** Get antiretroviral (ARV) treatment when needed and stay on it! Although there is currently no cure for AIDS, ARVs allow people who are HIV-positive to live happy, productive and satisfying lives. However, once you start on the drugs you must never stop, unless advised to do so by your doctor. Stopping and starting again weakens the effect of the drugs so that they will eventually stop protecting you. According to UNAIDS, in 2018 61% of people living with HIV in South Africa were receiving ART⁶.

*South Africa's antiretroviral treatment (ART) programme is the **largest in the world** and has increased national life expectancy from **61.2 years in 2010 to 67.7 years in 2015**⁷.*

4

FULL
ACCESS
TO
HEALTH
SERVICES

GET
INVOLVED

- Provide care to those who need it. At the moment, women and girls provide most of the care for orphans and people suffering from AIDS-related illnesses. This often leaves women and girls physically and emotionally drained and it prevents them from going to school and work. Some men are already involved but more need to be. Show that you care by providing regular support to people who need it wherever and whenever you can.
- Advocate for full access to health services and to improve our healthcare system. Our Constitution gives us "the right to have access to health care services." Government is working hard to make HIV treatment and care available to all who need it, but it remains a huge challenge. We can all make a difference by joining an AIDS advocacy organisation like the Treatment Action Campaign to keep up the pressure for full access to essential and quality health services for all in South Africa.
- Advocate for equal access to female condoms. There are currently far fewer female condoms available than male condoms, which is an infringement of women's rights. Speak out, and insist they are made available from the clinic near you – and contact Sonke or an HIV and AIDS-based organisation near you if you need assistance.

Remember, *the more people challenge the stigma, discrimination, secrecy, denial and inaction related to HIV and AIDS, the healthier the world will be for all of us!*



*Young women between the ages of 15 and 24 made up **37% of new infections** in South Africa in 2016⁴.*

Other research reveals that men are significantly less likely than women to get tested for HIV, even when they know they are at risk. The less men test, the faster the virus is spread, because people who do not know their status are less likely to protect themselves and others. Men's reluctance to test also means that they often seek treatment late, when their immune system is too weak to recover.

So, what can you do to prevent HIV and AIDS?

Plenty!

HERE ARE A FEW WAYS TO START:

1



KNOW YOUR STATUS

2



EDUCATE YOURSELF

3



PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

4



GET INVOLVED

ENDNOTES

- ¹ UNAIDS (2017) 'Ending AIDS: Progress towards 90-90-90 targets' [pdf]
- ² UNAIDS Data 2018
- ³ Medical Research Council (2012) Every Eight Hours: Intimate Femicide in South Africa ten years later! [pdf]
- ⁴ South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) (2017) 'National Strategic Plan 2017-2022' [pdf]
- ⁵ National Department of Health (NDOH) (2017) 'Annual Report 2016/2017' [pdf]
- ⁶ UNAIDS 'AIDSinfo' <https://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>
- ⁷ South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) (2017) 'Let our actions count: National Strategic Plan 2017-2022' [pdf]

NATIONAL HELPLINE NUMBERS

National GBV Helpline	0800 150 150
LifeLine South Africa	0861 322 322
AIDS Helpline	0800 012 322
National Counselling Line	0861 322 322
Childline South Africa	0800 055 555
South African Police Service	10111
Legal Aid	0800 110 110

Please note that Sonke does not offer counselling or other support services to individuals. For information on where to get help, visit our website <https://genderjustice.org.za/helpline-numbers/>.

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