

# MEN'S SEXUAL HEALTH



What you need to know

**engage**  
men's health

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# GET TO KNOW HIV



## What is HIV?

HIV stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**. The virus attacks your body's immune system, specifically the **CD4 cells**, which help keep your immune system healthy.

Untreated, HIV destroys more and more CD4 cells, making you more vulnerable to infections. The period of how quickly your CD4 cells get destroyed by HIV differs from person to person. Some people can live with HIV untreated for years without symptoms while others can get sick very quickly.

Treating HIV as soon as possible reduces damage to your immune system and keeps you and your partners healthy.

Someone who has HIV is said to be 'HIV positive'. Someone who does not have HIV is called 'HIV negative'.



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## How often do I have to test for HIV?

Depending on your sexual behavior, at least once a year. If you have multiple partners or have high risk sex it's recommended you test every **3 to 6 months**.

## How is HIV passed on?

HIV is passed on through sexual intercourse and exposure to the bodily fluids of a person who has high, untreated levels of HIV in their body. These fluids include:

- blood
- semen (cum) and pre-cum
- anal fluids and vaginal fluids
- breast milk

For HIV to be passed on, it must get into the HIV negative person's bloodstream by coming into contact with an open sore or cut.

The skin on the inside of the anus is very soft and fragile. Anal sex can cause tiny tears in the anus which makes it easier for HIV to go into that person's body. Unprotected anal sex has the highest risk for HIV transmission, especially for the bottom partner.

# How does HIV affect a person's immune system?

A normal **CD4 count** (number of infection-fighting cells in your body) is between **800** and **1600**. When a person who is HIV positive does not go onto **ARVs** (antiretroviral tablets used to treat HIV), their CD4 count gets lower over time.

At lower levels below **200** their bodies become very vulnerable to other opportunistic infections such as Tuberculosis (TB). This might indicate that the person has Aids (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome); the last and most dangerous stage of HIV infection.

# How do I prevent HIV?

The use of **condoms and water-based lube** when having sex is the best known way of preventing HIV. Taking **PrEP** – a daily HIV prevention pill – is also a very effective option. You can get all of these from Engage Men's Health for free.



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# WHAT

# IS PrEP?

(Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis)

PrEP is an HIV prevention pill that is usually taken once a day by someone who is HIV negative to avoid HIV infection.

Studies have shown that PrEP works best when it is taken consistently so that levels of the drug in the blood are high enough to stop HIV. You usually have to take it for 7 days before it starts working properly. When taken correctly, PrEP reduces the chances of HIV infection to almost zero.

PrEP, however, does not protect against other STIs (sexually transmitted infections), which is why using condoms is also recommended. Most people don't experience side effects from PrEP. If they do get them these tend to be very mild and usually go away within a few weeks.



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# WHAT IS PEP?

(Post-Exposure Prophylaxis)



PEP is a short-term course of ARVs (tablets to treat HIV) given to someone who is HIV negative after they have been exposed to HIV. For example, a condom breaking during anal sex, especially if he was the bottom.

PEP reduces the risk of becoming infected and must be started as soon as possible after the risky sex or high-risk exposure to HIV. PEP must be taken within 72 hours for it to be effective.

It's recommended that men who have been raped take PEP, unless they are HIV positive. The pills must be taken correctly, at the same time every day for 28 days.







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# CAN HIV BE TREATED?

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## ARVs - antiretrovirals

There is no cure for HIV. However, treatment can be very effective if taken correctly and every day. The medicine used to treat HIV is called **antiretrovirals** (ARVs). ARVs keep HIV positive people healthy so they can have the same life expectancy as someone who is HIV negative.

Taking ARVs as you should also lowers the chances of infecting your partner or partners.

It's recommended that people with HIV start ARVs as soon as possible. Along with ARV treatment, an HIV positive person needs to have their blood tested every six months to see if the medication is working as it should.

# How do doctors know how much HIV is in my body?

**Viral load** is a scientific measure of how many HIV particles are present in the bloodstream of someone who is HIV positive.

## What is adherence?

Starting HIV treatment, keeping all medical appointments, and taking ARVs every day as prescribed is called **adherence**. For people with HIV, adherence is the key to staying healthy.

Because HIV requires lifelong treatment, it's important for people with HIV to visit their health care provider regularly. Ongoing medical care includes monitoring to make sure a person's HIV treatment is keeping the virus under control.

Skipping ARVs allows HIV to multiply, which increases the risk of drug resistance and treatment failure. Poor adherence also allows HIV to damage the immune system, making it harder for the body to fight off infections and certain cancers.



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## Undetectable

A person living with HIV is considered to be **'undetectable'** when ARV treatment has brought the level of virus in their body to such low levels that blood tests cannot detect it.

## U=U

**U=U** is short for **Undetectable = Untransmittable**. It means that someone on ARVs with an undetectable HIV viral load cannot transmit HIV during sex, even when condoms are not used. U=U is part of an international campaign to raise awareness about the benefits of ARVs.

## HIV and your rights

The South African Constitution has a Bill of Rights that protects all people. This means that people living with HIV/AIDS have the same rights as any other person. No employer can require that a job applicant have an HIV test before they are employed.

# WHAT IS AN STI?



STI stands for **sexually transmitted infection**. While HIV is the best-known STI there are many others out there, some more serious than others. Having unprotected sex is how most STIs are passed on. This includes vaginal, anal and oral sex.

STIs can pass between men to men, men and women, and from women to women. Many STIs can be cured with antibiotics. While HIV has no cure it can be treated by controlling it with medication.



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# How do I know if someone has an STI?

You often cannot tell by looking at someone (including yourself) whether they have an infection. Many people do not show symptoms when they have an STI, so it's worth getting tested even if you feel fine – especially if you have multiple partners.

Using condoms with water-based lube protects you not only from HIV but also many other STIs. If you think you have an STI, the earlier you're tested, the sooner treatment can be given if it's needed. Untreated STIs can affect your health in many ways.

# KNOW YOUR STIs



## Hepatitis A

A liver infection that's spread by a virus in faeces (poo), mainly through contaminated food, poor hand-washing, oral-anal sex ("rimming") and giving oral sex after anal sex. Symptoms can appear up to eight weeks after sex and include tiredness and nausea. Hepatitis A is not usually life-threatening and it usually clears up after a couple of months.

### You can avoid getting Hepatitis A by:

- washing hands after sex (ideally, also buttocks, groin and penis)
- changing condoms between anal and oral sex
- using a barrier (such as a condom cut into a square) for rimming
- not sharing sex toys



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## Hepatitis B and C

Viral infections that cause inflammation of the liver. They are spread through contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids. They often don't cause obvious symptoms but can lead to a persistent infection and eventually serious liver disease, including liver cancer. Hepatitis B can be managed medically while Hepatitis C can be treated and is curable in many cases.

## Gonorrhoea ('the clap') and Chlamydia

Bacterial infections of the urethra, rectum or throat. Gonorrhoea and Chlamydia can cause stinging when urinating or the feeling that you want to urinate but can't. It's passed on through anal, oral or vaginal sex. There may be a discharge from the penis or pain in the testicles (although chlamydia can be symptom-free). Both STIs are treated with antibiotics.



## Genital herpes

Genital herpes is a viral infection. Symptoms can include painful blisters and ulcers on or around the penis or anus, although some people have no symptoms. It remains in the body and can cause recurrent episodes of blisters. Genital herpes can be passed on through oral sex with someone with a cold sore around or in their mouth, or by skin-to-skin genital contact with someone who is infected. Pills or a cream will help when symptoms flare up.

## Syphilis

Syphilis is a bacterial infection that causes a painless ulcer, usually in the genital area. The ulcer will disappear on its own, but other symptoms may appear, such as a rash on the body and swollen glands. In its early stages, syphilis is very infectious and can be passed on by close skin contact during sex. If left untreated for years, it can spread to other parts of the body and cause serious, long-term problems. Treatment is with antibiotic injections or tablets.



## Genital warts

This is a viral infection with symptoms that appear a few weeks or months after sex with an infected person. It can cause pinhead-sized growths, mostly on or around the head of the penis but also in and around the anus. The sooner warts are treated, the easier they are to deal with. You can't treat genital warts with the same cream you use for warts on the hands. A doctor will freeze them or use a cream to remove them.

## Get tested

If you have any of these symptoms or are worried you may have an STI, speak to your GP or healthcare worker. If you have an active sex life with multiple partners it's a good idea to get tested regularly to ensure that you and your partners stay healthy.



# SPREAD THE WORD



There are many ways you can play a part in the fight to ensure sexual health for all. The more we talk about it the better. Here are ways that you can make a difference:

If your friends are not being responsible with their health, inform them about ways that they can look after themselves. You can suggest they go to an HIV testing service, event or clinic and make a fun outing of it.

If you are in a new relationship, talk about sex and your sexual health status early on. Getting tested together is a great way to show your commitment when you are serious about someone.

Be a mentor and someone younger guys in the community can look up to by sharing valuable information like where to get condoms, ARVs and PrEP and encourage them to test.



# OTHER HEALTH MATTERS

## Circumcision

Male circumcision reduces the risk of HIV transmission for the top partner. If you have a foreskin that often tears or bleeds after sex or masturbation, speak to your healthcare worker about circumcision. It is available for free at a number of clinics.

## Erectile dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction, or ED, is the inability to achieve or sustain an erection (get hard). It happens to most men at some point in their lives. Causes can include chronic illnesses, poor blood flow to the penis, drinking alcohol, life stress, or being tired. Stress about performing during sex or anxiety about staying hard can also lead to erection problems. Because it could be due to one or more causes, ask a healthcare worker for a check-up.



# ENGAGE WITH US!



Engage Men's Health offers free and confidential sexual health services to gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM) in Johannesburg, Nelson Mandela Bay and Buffalo City. These include HIV testing and treatment, PrEP, PEP, TB and STI screening, and condoms and lube. With us, you can be yourself without stigma or judgment.

**NATIONAL CALL / WHATSAPP LINE**  
**082 607 1686**

**JOHANNESBURG - Melville clinic**

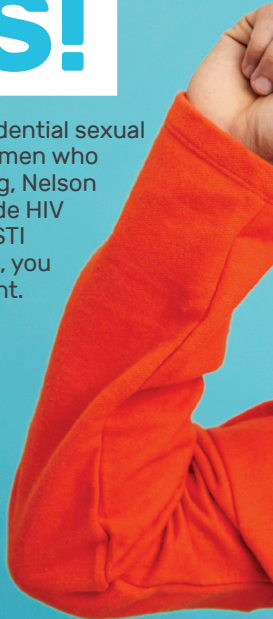
**Tel:** 010 500 0934

**Address:** 27 Boxes, 74, 4th Ave,  
Melville, 2092 (at the back of the centre,  
look for the signs).

**NELSON MANDELA BAY**

**Tel:** 010 534 8428

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41 Bird St, Central, Port Elizabeth, 6001





**BUFFALO CITY**

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