

21. Getting Tested for HIV



Objectives

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- Describe the process of HIV testing.
- List reasons for getting tested for HIV.



Background notes

It is not possible to know if people have HIV by looking at them. The only way for people to know if they have HIV is to have a test for HIV. In Kenya, HIV testing comes with counselling, which means talking about HIV and the test with a trained person. During this talk, people learn how to take care of themselves if they are HIV positive or prevent HIV infection if they are negative. This process is called voluntary counselling and testing, or VCT.

The HIV test is safe and painless. The health worker takes a small amount of blood from a person's finger. The person tested cannot get weak from blood loss because very little blood is taken. HIV tests look for HIV antibodies. If the body is making antibodies to fight HIV, then someone is considered to be HIV positive.

The window period is the time between when HIV enters the body and the moment when the HIV test can detect HIV antibodies. Usually the test can detect antibodies within 3 months of infection and in rare occasions, it can take up to 6 months. This means that for months after infection, the test may not be able to tell whether or not someone is infected. These months are known as the window period. During this window period, it is possible to infect others with HIV.

There are many reasons to get tested for HIV. If a person has had unprotected sex and is worrying about HIV infection and is worried about every spot or cough, the only way to put his or her mind at ease might be to have an HIV test. If a person has had sex with someone who has fallen sick and has AIDS, then that person will also worry. Perhaps the only way for that person to put his or her mind at ease is to go for VCT. People should never assume that they are infected or that they are not infected. They should always go for a test.

People should be tested for HIV if they have:

- Sexual activity with many partners.
- Encounters with sex workers.
- Previous treatment for STIs.
- Blood transfusions.
- Anal sexual activity (male or female).
- Injection drug use.
- Sexual activity with partners having any of the above.
- Children born to women with any of the above.

It is normal for people to not want to go for testing because they are afraid. The sooner someone knows their status, the easier it will be to make choices to stay healthy. If they are positive, there are many ways to stay healthy longer. If they are negative, they can make choices to help stay that way.



Session guide

1. Facilitate a discussion by asking group members the following questions:
 - How can you know if someone is HIV infected?
 - What does VCT mean?
 - What is the window period? How long does it last?
 - Why are people afraid to get tested?
 - Who should be tested for HIV?
2. After discussing all of the questions, share the information from the Background Notes section.



Main points

- The only way to know if someone is HIV infected is to be tested.
- VCT stands for voluntary counselling and testing and means that a person receives counselling before and after the HIV test.
- The HIV test is safe and painless.
- It takes some time for the body to produce enough antibodies for HIV to be noticed in an HIV test. This means that someone can be infected with HIV but will not test positive. This time is called the “Window Period.” The window period is usually 3 months but in very rare cases could be 6 months.
- People who are HIV infected are able to transmit the virus to others during the window period.
- People who have a negative test result and have had unprotected sex during the past 3 months are advised to go for another test in 3 months. During this time, they should not have unprotected sex.



Activity: Role play

1. Divide group members into pairs.
2. Explain that they will role play the following situation. One partner is afraid he or she may be HIV infected but does not want to go for VCT. The other partner counsels the friend.
3. After 5 minutes ask group members to switch roles and start a new role play.
4. With the whole group, ask group members to talk about the advice they gave to their partner during the role play. Lead a discussion with group members to talk about whether they think the advice given is helpful.

22. Caring for people with HIV



Objectives

By the end of this session, group members will be able to:

- List ways to provide support to people living with HIV and AIDS.
- List ways people with HIV can stay healthy.
- Describe why hygiene is especially important for people with HIV and AIDS.
- Explain how ART works.



Background notes

People who are HIV positive need support from friends and family members. When people learn they are HIV positive, it is normal for them to feel worried, stressed, scared, and angry. We can help them to feel better by listening to and talking with them. Remember that HIV is not passed through normal, everyday contact, so we can play together, eat together, live together, share the same bathrooms, and sit next to each other. It is important for people who are HIV positive to know that you care about them and are there to help them if they need it.

Staying healthy

People with HIV and AIDS need to eat healthy foods to fight infection and to stay strong. People who are HIV positive and do not eat healthy foods are more likely to develop AIDS faster, because their bodies are weak and cannot fight infection. People with HIV and AIDS need to pay attention to the food they eat, because often they eat less, have infections that require more energy, and their bodies do not use food properly.

People with HIV and AIDS need to eat more than people who are not infected. Eating small meals often and eating a variety of healthy foods can help people with HIV and AIDS to get all the energy and vitamins they need.

People with HIV should:

- Eat at least three meals a day, and have snacks between meals.
- Eat even when they are sick or have no appetite. Eating small but many meals can help to do this.
- Eat many fruits and vegetables of different colours.
- Eat fats, oils, and sugars in small quantities and limit processed foods, salt, coffee, tea, and sodas.
- Avoid alcohol, smoking, raw eggs, raw fish, and undercooked meat.

Practicing good hygiene is important for everyone to avoid infection. It is especially important for people with HIV and AIDS because their immune system is weak and they are more likely to fall sick. The following should be done to practice good hygiene:

- Handle and store food and water properly to avoid contamination and further infection.
- Only use water from a clean source, and store it in a container with a lid.
- Boil water for at least 5-10 minutes to kill germs before drinking it.
- Always wash hands with soap before and after touching food.
- Cook all animal products (meat, chicken, fish, and eggs) at high temperatures until completely cooked.
- Wash utensils and surfaces used for preparing and cooking foods.
- Use clean water to wash all fruits and vegetables that will be eaten raw or remove the skin.
- Store cooked food at most for one day and re-heat before eating.
- Only use bowls, plates, glasses, and utensils that have been cleaned and well dried.

Infections can be avoided by practicing good personal hygiene:

- Take baths every day to keep the body clean.
- Wear shoes to avoid small injuries that could result in infection.
- Brush teeth after meals.
- Wash hands with soap after going to the toilet and after handling pets and animals.

AIDS in the home

The home is a very important place for a person with AIDS. If a person with AIDS has a caring and understanding family, he or she will feel better. A person with AIDS needs both emotional support and physical care. Relatives can often give the best care. The person will feel good at home where he or she is surrounded by loved ones.

Emotional support

- Ask the person to talk about how he or she feels.
- Encourage him or her to do as much as possible without help from others.
- Give support and praise when deserved.
- Ask the person how they prefer to have things done (food preparation or cleaning).
- When people feel angry or sad, encourage them to express their feelings and let them know it is normal to feel bad sometimes.
- The most common feelings are fear, anger, hopelessness, sadness, and loneliness. Let them know you are there to listen and talk to them, and their feelings are normal.

Physical support

Below are common conditions for people with HIV and AIDS and how you can help.

- **Appetite loss:** Eat with them and ask what they would like to eat and drink, when and how much. Physical exercise helps improve appetite.
- **Feeling sick to the stomach, vomiting and diarrhoea:** Smaller meals with little fat and not strong flavours may reduce vomiting and diarrhoea. Encourage eating dry foods like toast or biscuits. Sucking on a lemon may settle a sick stomach. Encourage drinking liquids between meals if they can't eat. Use gloves to clean up vomit and wash hands with soap after using the restroom.
- **Sores in the mouth:** Use warm salty water gargle. Avoid oranges and other food that may hurt the sores. Eat warm soft foods. Use mouth washes.
- **Cough:** Rest in a room with open windows. Seek medical treatment.
- **Fevers:** Drink extra fluids. Panadol may be used. See a doctor.
- **Weakness:** Encourage activity. Have rest periods. Use a bath chair.
- **Skin problems:** Change sleeping positions to avoid sores. Encourage short walks. Wash sores but use gloves if sores are open. Apply soothing lotions to dry skin.
- **Confusion and forgetting:** Keep clocks and calendars and remind the person of the day, time, and where they are. Make sure the home is safe. For example, remove loose rugs, stairs, medicines, and sharp objects.



If you are caring for someone with HIV, remember to do the following:

- When throwing away items for cleaning (gloves and other soiled things) they should be burned or placed inside two plastic bags tied tightly.
- When washing clothes that are soiled with body fluids wear gloves, use Jik and soap, and keep the items separate from other laundry. If not soiled, wash as normal.
- If injections are given, clean needles and syringes by boiling them; store them in a plastic or metal box that will not puncture. Used disposable needles and syringes should be placed in thick cardboard, glass, plastic, or metal containers and thrown away. Wash thermometers with soap.
- When bathing people should cover open wounds with a bandage or cloth.
- Clean the toilet and bathroom areas often, using gloves and Jik.
- Wash dishes with hot soapy water and dry them completely.

Antiretroviral therapy

ART (antiretroviral therapy) is a combination of medicines that slow HIV from spreading in the body. ART helps the immune system get strong so it can fight infections and illness. Just like repairing a roof on a house helps keep out the rain. When people take ART they get sick less often and feel better longer. ART is not a cure for HIV. ART reduces the numbers of HIV in the blood, but cannot eliminate it.

ART does not prevent against re-infection from HIV. When someone is taking ART, they should continue to protect themselves and others by not having sex or using a condom every time.

ART is a lifetime commitment. Stopping and starting, or missing tablets stops the ART from working. Taking some of the tablets but not others also stops ART from working. ART drugs should never be shared with someone else. If shared they will not help either person.

If someone with HIV still has a strong immune system, there are other ways for him or her to stay healthy without beginning ART. He or she should talk with a doctor about those options.



Session guide

1. Facilitate a discussion by asking group members the following questions:
 - Why is it important that people with HIV eat foods that are healthy?
 - What are examples of healthy foods?
 - Are there any foods that people with HIV should not eat?
 - How can you support someone who is infected with HIV?
 - What is ART?
 - Is there a cure for HIV and AIDS?
2. After discussing all of the questions, share the information from the Background Notes section.



Main points

- People with HIV and AIDS need to eat healthy foods to fight infection and to stay strong.
- It is important for people with HIV and AIDS to practice good hygiene to avoid infection because their immune system is weak and they are more likely to fall sick.
- ART stands for antiretroviral therapy. It is a combination of medicines that slow HIV from spreading in the body. ART helps the immune system get strong so it can fight infections and illness. ART is not a cure for HIV.