



Your **2019** guide to

HIV Counselling and testing (HCT)



What is **HCT**?

HCT stands for ***HIV voluntary counselling and testing.***

Voluntary

Voluntary testing means that the individual has to give their consent for an HIV test. No one may be forced to do an HIV test.

Counselling

HIV testing cannot be done without counselling. Counselling is the process of giving professional assistance and guidance before (pre-counselling) and after (post-counselling) the HIV test.

- Counselling informs, educates and supports the person who is being or has been tested;
- In counselling, you have the opportunity to address your concerns, fears or any questions related to HIV.

Testing

The HIV test is done from a blood sample, there are two types of tests and these are rapid test and blood testing:

- Rapid test - finger prick.
- Blood test - a full blood sample is taken from a person's vein and tested at a laboratory.



Pre-counselling

The counsellor should provide you with the following information before the HIV test:

- The benefits of testing.
- The potential risks such as discrimination and abandonment.
- How the test is performed.
- Guarantee confidentiality.
- Voluntary testing.

The counsellor should also:

- Ask you why you want to be tested. It might be that you just want to know your HIV status or you have engaged in risky behaviour, placing you at risk of being infected with HIV;
- Ask if you have tested for HIV before;
- Explain to you how HIV is transmitted and how you place yourself at risk of contracting it;
- Ask you what you will do if the HIV test is negative or if it is positive.

Pre-test information for women who are or may become pregnant includes:

- Risks of transmitting HIV to the infant;
- Measures that can be taken to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV;
- Benefits to infants and mothers of the early diagnosis and detection of HIV.

**No one should be tested for HIV
*without his or her consent***

It is important for you to read and understand what is written on the consent form.

It usually states that:

- You had a pre-counselling session.
- The HIV test has been explained to you.

And in some cases, it can also require your authorisation for the counsellor to:

- Contact you after the HCT session.
- Give your contact details to your medical aid (if you have one).
- You do not have to sign a consent form agreeing to have an HIV test if you feel you need more time to think about it or if you have any questions.

Confidentiality

Counsellors all sign confidentiality clauses and they are not allowed to disclose any information to anyone about your HIV status (e.g. your employer, partner or family) without your consent. This means that you do not have to tell anyone your HIV status unless you prefer to do so.

It is important for you to be able to deal with the HIV test result.

If the test is negative

- Do you know how to stay negative (for example not engaging in any risky behaviour)?

If the test is positive

- What will you do?
- Do you have someone who can help you to deal with the result?
- Do you know that there are effective treatments available for HIV?

The pre-counselling and the post-counselling sessions are face-to-face meetings held in a private consultation room.

Who should **be tested?**

Testing is recommended if:

- You think you may have been exposed to HIV.
- You are sexually active.
- You have experienced a sexually transmitted disease.
- You have engaged in unprotected sexual activities with one or more partners.
- You have used street drugs and shared needles.
- You are a healthcare worker with direct exposure to blood.
- You are pregnant or want to be pregnant and want to be sure you are not infected.

The window period

The window period is a term used to describe the period of time between HIV infection and the production of antibodies. It takes 15 days to three weeks for the body to produce antibodies. During this time, an antibody test may give a “false negative” result, which means that the test is negative even though the person is actually infected with HIV. The only way to be sure you are HIV negative is to be tested every six months, and take the necessary precautions.

How often should I be tested?

- After a possible HIV exposure and three months later.
- If you continue to engage in risky behaviour, you should continue to have yourself tested periodically (i.e. every six months or every year);
- Before or during pregnancy. While the test may be negative during the window period, people who have been infected with HIV are highly contagious at this time; they can pass the virus more easily to others.

The HIV test

HIV antibody tests are usually used for the day-to-day diagnosing of HIV in adults.

How do antibody tests work?

- When a person is infected with HIV, the body responds by producing special proteins (named antibodies) that fight the virus.
- An HIV test looks for these antibodies in blood and saliva.
- If antibodies to HIV are detected, it usually means the person has been infected with HIV. Most people develop detectable HIV antibodies within three months of being infected.

Rapid antibodies test

- A drop of blood is taken by finger prick and tested for the presence of HIV antibodies.
- This drop of blood is put on a special testing device.
- After 10-20 minutes, depending on the test used, the result will be available.

Finger pricking is a simple method of obtaining blood. It is also quicker and less painful than taking blood from a vein and sending it to the laboratory.

Rapid tests are commonly used to test for HIV and are called “rapid” as the results are available within 10-20 minutes.

If the test result appears positive

- A second test (confirmatory test) from a different type of test must be done.
- If the confirmatory test is positive, it means that the HIV test is positive. There is no need to do another test.
- If the confirmatory test is negative, the results are called “discordant”. A full blood test (ELISA) must then be performed at the laboratory.

A positive result is only confirmed when two different tests done on two different blood samples are positive.

Post-counselling

All individuals undergoing HIV testing must be offered counselling when their test results are given, regardless of the test result.

The result must be given in person to each individual by a trained counsellor. The purpose of the post-counselling session is:

- To make sure that the test result is understood by the person tested
- To inform that person on the next steps they will need to take in order to stay healthy and help prevent the spread of the virus

What happens if your HIV test result is negative?

The counsellor will:

- Explain the test result to you including information about the window period.
- Recommend you to re-test in three months' time if you have recently engaged in risky behaviour.
- Give you basic advice on the ways to prevent HIV transmission.
- Provide you with male or female condoms and guidance on their use.

What happens if your HIV test result is positive?

Two positive HIV tests mean that you are infected with HIV. However, it does not mean that you have AIDS. Because a person living with HIV is infected for life, you can pass the virus to others by having unprotected sex or by sharing needles or equipment for usage of drugs. A woman who lives with HIV can pass it on to her unborn or breast-fed baby. Most people test positive while they do not have any symptoms of infection.

If your HIV test is positive, the counsellor will:

- Provide you with psychosocial support to cope with the emotional impact of the test result.
- Help you to identify places where you can find support whether it is through a partner, your family member or a support group.
- Help you to find treatment, care and prevention services.
- Allow you to ask questions about your condition.

The counsellor will also:

- Provide you with information on how to prevent the transmission and spread of HIV
- Provide male and female condoms and guidance on their use
- Discuss whether you want to disclose your result to your loved ones and, if you do, discuss with you when and to whom you would like to disclose your status
- Provide information on other relevant preventative health measures such as good nutrition and the use of medicines to prevent infections
- Arrange a specific date and time for follow-up visits or referrals for treatment, care, counselling, support and other services that are appropriate
- Refer you to have additional tests to assess the stage of your infection. Among these tests are the CD4 count and viral load

Key messages

- Everyone must know their HIV status. Go and get tested along with your partner!
- Pregnant women should know their HIV status to avoid transmitting the virus to their baby.
- A positive result does not tell where nor when the transmission occurred should your HIV test be positive.
- You are not alone; counsellors, support groups, your family and friends can help you.

If you are diagnosed with HIV:

- Get help from your partner, friend or relative.
- Learn about the disease.
- Take care of your health.
- Disclose your status to your sexual partner(s) so they can be tested as well.

Being diagnosed early is the best way to:

- Prevent the transmission of the infection to others.
- Access treatment early enough to prevent yourself reaching the AIDS stage.
- Live a healthy life.
- Make informed choices.

Remember if your test is negative, it does not mean that your partner is also negative. Encourage him or her to be tested too.

Where can I find help in dealing with HIV?

- Enrol on the GEMS HIV/AIDS Disease Management Programme (DMP)
- Your information is kept confidential since the programme is managed by a team of health professionals separately from other scheme programmes and your employer.
- Learn about the disease and choose the right doctor for you, one that makes you feel comfortable and encourages you to participate in your treatment plan.
- The main member or their dependant/s can register.
- Please call **0860 436 736** or use our “please call me number” **083 843 67 64** from Monday to Friday between 8am and 5pm and Saturday from 8am to 12pm or email us at **hiv@gems.gov.za** for further information on the programme, ask for an application form to enrol and get contact details of treating doctors in your area.

How do I send a “please call me”?

When using the Vodacom network:

- Enter the following digits into your cell phone
*140*0838436764#
- Your “please call me” message has now been sent and a treatment counsellor will contact you within 24 hours.

When using the MTN network:

- Enter the following digits into your cell phone
*121*0838436764#
- Your “please call me” message has now been sent and a treatment counsellor will contact you within 24 hours.

When using the Cell C network:

- Enter the following digits into your cell phone
*111*0838436764#
- Your “please call me” message has now been sent and a treatment counsellor will contact you within 24 hours.

Visit your treating doctor who must examine you and complete your application form. You will need to sign the application form and your doctor should submit it to GEMS by fax to the confidential toll-free fax number **0800 436 732** or email to **hiv@gems.gov.za**.

As soon as your application has been received and approved, you will be notified via your preferred method of communication (such as SMS, post or email). You will then be able to access your medical care benefits where appropriate.

You will receive the support you need to lead a healthy and productive life and access the following benefits:

- Pathology (blood) tests
- ART drugs and medicines to prevent and treat opportunistic infections including multivitamins where appropriate. In general, individuals are given a fixed-dose combination (FDC) of three medicines. FDC is a combination of three different antiretroviral medicines. They are combined together as one pill to make it easier for a patient to swallow. The treatment is adapted to suit the needs of each individual and prescribed by a family doctor or family practitioner. HIV treatment is permanent and lifelong. It is effective if the person is committed and consistent in taking medicine on time and every day. Your doctor will monitor the efficacy of your treatment by assessing you every six months or more frequently if necessary
- Clinical support and guidelines for your treating doctor
- Regular monitoring of your condition to ensure you start treatment at the right time, that it is effective and that you are compliant with your treatment
- Reminders to do regular check-ups and tests to monitor the state of your health
- On-going psycho-social support
- Treatment to prevent the transmission of the virus from mother to child
- If you should accidentally expose any of your HIV negative dependants or if you are HIV negative and you are exposed to infected bodily fluids, you will receive treatment to prevent the transmission of the virus. The CD4 count is an important test to assess the damage done by the virus in your body.





Contact details

GEMS HIV/AIDS Disease Management Programme

Call: 0860 436 736

Please call me: 083 843 67 64

Email: hiv@gems.gov.za

For other Chronic conditions

Call: 0860 00 4367

Email: chronicdsp@gems.gov.za

www.gems.gov.za





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