



engaging people

IN FOCUS: HCT



HCT. The voluntary **do-what's-best** test.

HCT stands for **HIV Counselling and Testing**, also known as VCT – Voluntary Counselling and Testing. By participating in HCT or VCT, you have the opportunity to make well-informed decisions about the rest of your life, whether you test HIV-positive or HIV-negative.

When we are tested, even though we may not be at risk of HIV infection, it will help to lessen the stigma associated with the HIV test.

Before the test itself you will receive education and pre-counselling to help you understand what the test is about and to help you deal with the result, whatever it may be. After the test, you will again get counselling to help you understand the result and to help you make decisions about your future.

If the test is positive:

If you discover that you are infected with HIV, you can:

- Learn more about the virus and how it affects your body.
- It is important that you seek assistance, for example from your medical aid scheme or a public sector health facility.
- Look after your health so that you stay as healthy as possible for as long as possible.

- Learn to recognise the signs of opportunistic infections so you can get them treated promptly.
- Find out what resources are available within your community to help you manage your HIV status.
- Find out about antiretroviral medicine. The medicines do not cure HIV and Aids, but they can control the viral load and boost your immune system so that you are less likely to get opportunistic infections such as tuberculosis and pneumonia, especially *pneumocystis pneumonia* (PCP).
- If you are a pregnant mother, you can prevent the risk of passing on the virus to your baby. When you find out that you are pregnant, tell a trusted health professional that you are HIV-positive so that you can start with antiretroviral therapy before the birth. The baby can also receive treatment after the birth. You must also ask about birthing options and consider bottle feeding as opposed to breast feeding.
- Get emotional support by seeking counselling and joining support groups.
- Make sure that you don't infect anyone else or get re-infected yourself. If two people who are HIV-positive have unprotected sex, there is the risk of reinfection or *superinfection* when a different strain or HIV type is introduced into the body. This

is life threatening as treatment is complicated and potentially ineffective.

- Learn how to manage the stress in your life.

In short, it means getting information and counselling on how to live positively with the virus. This includes learning to accept the fact that you are HIV-infected, seeking emotional support, eating a healthy diet, looking after your body, learning how to control the amount of stress in your life, making sure you don't become re-infected and planning for the future.

If the test is negative:

- If you are not infected with HIV, you will receive advice on how to stay HIV-negative. The "window period" will also be explained to you and you will be advised whether or not to have a second test within a couple of weeks.
- The counselling will also help you to accept and support those who are infected.

Contact us

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