

HIV and STI testing for African Communities

Terrence
HIGGINS
TRUST
♥

Terrence
HIGGINS
TRUST
♥

BE WISE



In partnership with

Heal

Health empowerment for London

Funded by the Pan-London HIV Prevention Programme

The HIV and sexual health charity for life

Website: www.tht.org.uk THT Direct: 0845 12 21 200

Registered office: 314-320 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8DP

Tel: 020 7812 1600 Email: info@tht.org.uk

©Terrence Higgins Trust, October 2009. Code 10152.00. Terrence Higgins Trust is a registered charity in England and Wales (reg. no. 288527) and in Scotland (SC039986). Company reg. no. 1778149. A company limited by guarantee. If you have any questions or comments about this resource, or would like information on the evidence used to produce it, please email feedback@tht.org.uk. The information included in this publication was correct at the time of going to press. We plan to review this publication in January 2010. For updates or for the latest information, visit tht.org.uk.

Design Felton Communication 020 7405 0900 Ref: 11487

In partnership with

Heal

Health empowerment for London

BE WISE

WHY GET TESTED?

- 3 Why have an HIV test?
- 4 Why have an STI test?

GETTING TESTED

- 5 Where can I go to get tested?
- 6 What services do clinics provide?
- 7 How much will I need to pay?
- 7 Do I need to make an appointment?

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE CLINIC?

- 8 What type of questions do they ask?
- 9 Can I talk to someone who is the same gender as me?
- 9 What tests will they do?
- 9 How does the test for HIV work?

GETTING TEST RESULTS

- 10 Who will know the results?
- 10 How long will it take to get the results?
- 11 What if my HIV test comes back positive?

MY RESULTS WERE NEGATIVE, BUT ...

- 12 How often should I get tested?
- 12 HIV and immigration

People from African communities in the UK have some of the highest rates of HIV infection in the country. So it is vital that we know about HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), how and where we can get tested, and who is there to help us if we need it. This booklet is to help you find out what you need to know.

You can find the contact details for all of the organisations we mention at the back of the booklet.

Why get TESTED?

The only way to know whether or not we have HIV or any other STI is to have a test.

In the UK we can get very good, free treatment for HIV and STIs. So people living with HIV here can live long lives, as long as we start treatment before HIV has weakened our bodies too much. This means getting tested soon after we have been at risk of infection and starting treatment quickly.

If we don't get tested soon enough we can't get the full benefit of HIV treatment, which means we are more likely to get dangerously ill. In the past this has happened to a higher proportion of African people in the UK than other communities. But there are lots of options for getting tested and treated, including African support groups, so everyone should be able to find somewhere that suits them.

Also, in the UK testing and treatment for HIV and STIs is confidential, so nobody needs to know unless we choose to tell them.

Why have an HIV test?

It may seem obvious, but having an HIV test lets you find out if you have HIV. And knowing that will let you make clear decisions about your health and your life. Once you know whether you have HIV or not (whether you are "positive" or "negative"), you can take control and plan what to do next.

If you are worried about HIV, having a test can give you peace of mind. The stress of trying to guess will disappear.

If the test comes back positive, you can get the treatment you need, and you can also get the information and support that you need.



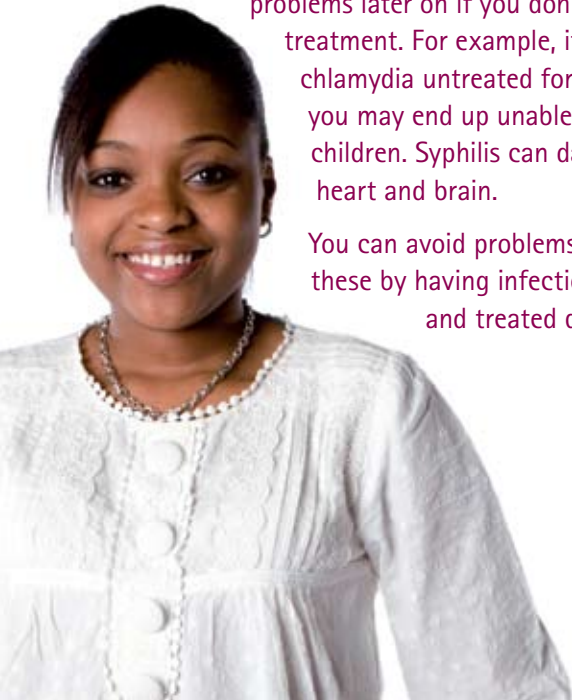
Why have an STI test?

Most STIs are treatable. Some common bacterial infections, such as gonorrhoea and chlamydia, can be treated by taking antibiotics. There are some viral infections, such as herpes and genital warts, that cannot be cured, but you can take treatments to prevent or get rid of the symptoms.

It is worth getting tested and treated. Although the symptoms of some STIs are minor when you first get infected, and you might not notice any symptoms at all at first, most STIs can cause serious health problems later on if you don't get

treatment. For example, if you leave chlamydia untreated for a long time, you may end up unable to have children. Syphilis can damage your heart and brain.

You can avoid problems such as these by having infections diagnosed and treated quickly.



Getting TESTED

Where can I go to get tested?

Sexual health clinics (sometimes called genitourinary medicine or GUM clinics) will give you free, confidential diagnosis and treatment for HIV and other STIs. They can also give you free help and information.

You can also get free HIV or STI tests at your local GP or doctor's surgery and free HIV tests at any Terrence Higgins Trust testing clinic.

For more information about these and to find the location of your nearest clinic, you can contact **African Aids Helpline, THT Direct, NHS Direct** or **Mambo online**.

What services do clinics provide?

Clinics can do tests to see if you have any infections. If you have an infection, they will also offer you treatment.

Just as importantly, sexual health clinics can offer information and advice about HIV and other STIs. They can also give advice if you are experiencing other difficulties with your sex life, such as having a low sex drive or other reproductive health concerns.

You can get free condoms and information booklets on sexual health from these clinics too. Some of the African community-based organisations across Greater London also offer free condoms and booklets – any that do not should all be able to tell you where you can get them.



**IT'S
FREE**



How much will I have to pay?

If you are eligible to use NHS services then you can get free HIV and STI tests at NHS sexual health clinics, HIV testing clinics and GP surgeries. However, if you go to a private doctor, you will be charged fees.

If you have an STI, treatment is also free at NHS clinics and is usually given to you straightaway.

Do I need to make an appointment?

Most clinics will see you without an appointment, but it is best to call first to check. You may also minimise your waiting time by booking an appointment. You can find details of clinics from the **African AIDS Helpline**, **THT Direct**, local African community-based organisations or **Mambo online**.

What happens at the clinic?

What type of questions do they ask?

At the clinic you will be seen by a doctor, nurse or sexual health advisor. They will ask questions about your sex life. You might find some of these embarrassing, but you should always give an honest answer. That is because they need to know about your sex life so they can decide what kind of tests you need. Don't worry – doctors and nurses are used to talking to people about sex and they will not judge you.



Can I talk to someone who is the same gender as me?

Some clinics can arrange for you to be seen by either a male or female staff member. If you want to be seen by someone who is the same gender as you, call the clinic first to check that this is possible. Also, make sure that they know when you are going to attend, so that this person will be available.

What tests will they do?

At a sexual health clinic they will usually do urine and blood tests. The doctor or nurse may also want to check your genital area to look for any signs of infection, and they may take a swab with a cotton bud from your penis, vagina or anus. They might also take swabs from your mouth or throat.

The tests should not be painful, but they may be a little uncomfortable.

How does the test for HIV work?

The two most common HIV tests look for signs of HIV in the bloodstream. If someone has been infected with HIV, their immune system creates antigens and antibodies in response to the presence of HIV. The HIV tests look for either HIV antigens or HIV antibodies in the blood.

Getting test results

Who will know the test results?

Sexual health clinics follow strict rules when it comes to confidentiality. Unless you give your permission, your test results will not be given to your family, your partner, your family doctor or the immigration authorities.

How long will it take to get the results?

If you have a blood test at your GP's surgery or a sexual health clinic, you should receive your results within a week.

Waiting for the results of an HIV test can be worrying and some people find it very stressful. But there are ways to get the results much faster if that is important for you.

Some sexual health clinics and community-based HIV testing clinics can have your results ready in just 20 minutes. The African AIDS Helpline can

provide information about local African community-based organisations near you that offer sexual health services and may be able to tell you which ones offer results fast, or you can check with the individual organisation.

In some towns, Terrence Higgins Trust runs HIV testing services that can give you your results in just one hour. These tests are free and confidential for everyone. The clinics are run by trained health professionals who have experience of providing counselling both before and after the test. You can find out where these clinics are from THT Direct.

What do I do if my HIV test comes back positive?

If your HIV test result comes back positive, you should be offered post-test counselling at the clinic or GP surgery where you had the test done. This will let you talk about how you feel and ask any questions you might have. They should also give you details of where you can get information, support and treatment for HIV.



My results were **NEGATIVE, but...**

How often should I get tested?

How often to test for infections depends on how many people you've had sex with and if you think you have any symptoms. Also, you're at more risk of getting an infection if you've had sex without a condom. If you think you might have symptoms a sexual health check-up is strongly recommended. But you can have some infections without symptoms, so a check-up at least once a year is a good idea. The more people you have sex with, the more likely you are to get an infection and need a check-up. Any time you think you may have put yourself at risk of HIV you can ask for an HIV test. HIV tests are also usually offered as part of a check-up; saying yes to one is a good idea.

HIV and immigration

As long as you meet immigration law requirements, having HIV will not be used to stop you getting a visa, work permit or permission to remain in the UK*. Your immigration status may affect your right to testing and treatment on the NHS. You can get more information from the African AIDS Helpline.

* Correct as of October 2009

Contacts

African AIDS Helpline

0800 0967 500

www.africaninengland.org.uk

African AIDS Helpline helps you to make informed choices from the various sexual health treatment and support services available for Africans.

THT Direct

0845 12 21 200

www.tht.org.uk

www.tht.org.uk/fastest (for Terrence Higgins Trust's one-hour results testing centres)

THT Direct can answer questions about sex, sexual health and HIV, and put you in touch with support on sex and sexuality-based issues.

NHS Direct

0845 4647

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

NHS Direct provides health advice and information, including sexual health.

Mambo Online

www.mambo.org.uk

Mambo is the healthier lifestyle magazine for African communities in the UK.