



HIV/AIDS and children

Who we are

Bankmed (referred to as 'the Scheme'), registration number 1279, is a non-profit organisation, registered with the Council for Medical Schemes. Discovery Health (Pty) Ltd (referred to as 'the administrator') is a separate company and an authorised financial services provider (registration number 1997/013480/07) which takes care of the administration of your membership for the Scheme.

Understanding how children get HIV

Between 15% and 45% of babies born to HIV-positive mothers will contract HIV, if nothing is done to prevent this. HIV is transmitted during pregnancy, at delivery and during breastfeeding. HIV medications (antiretrovirals or ARVs) help prevent mother-to-child transmission. It is therefore important to know one's HIV status early on in pregnancy in order to start treatment early and to always remember to discuss safe breastfeeding with your doctor. Children can also contract HIV through sexual abuse. Speak to Child Line on 0800 055 555 if you think a child is being sexually abused.

A pregnant mother can protect her child from getting HIV

- All pregnant women should have an HIV test early in pregnancy
- All HIV-positive pregnant women should receive HIV medication to prevent mother-to-child transmission
- The mother can discuss safe breastfeeding and other alternative feeding choices with her Healthcare Professional. It's very important that the baby or the mother, or both, always have access to HIV medication during the period of breastfeeding, to protect the baby from being infected with HIV

How do I know if my child is HIV positive?

Only a blood test will reveal if your child has the virus or not.

Babies born to HIV-positive mothers are often tested at six weeks after birth with a specific test that looks for the virus in their blood. This is called the PCR test. This test can be done again when the baby is six months old. The timing of an HIV test will also depend on whether or not the baby is breastfed.

What you should do if you think your child is HIV positive?

You should visit your Healthcare Professional as soon as possible if your child has any of the following signs:

- Your child does not gain weight
- Your child gets sick often and more than other children

These signs are not only specific to HIV; they could be related to any other illness. The only way to find out for sure is to take the child to a Healthcare Professional or clinic as soon as possible to make sure that the necessary tests are performed and proper treatment is provided.

Ways to help fight the infection

Feed your child fresh, healthy foods.

To ensure an HIV-positive child's body is strong to fight the virus, make sure that your child eats healthy food. A child with HIV needs more energy and nutrients to fight the infection.

A child receives energy and nutrients through eating healthy food. Healthy eating can strengthen the body so that the child's immune system can help fight infections associated with HIV and AIDS. Healthy eating means eating foods that supply your body with all the energy and nutrients it needs every day.

Children need the right balance of starchy foods, fats and oils, proteins, vitamins, minerals and water in order to be healthy. Giving the child the right amounts of different foods will help prevent weight loss and muscle loss. Good food also replaces nutrients and helps with nutrition problems. For example, calcium is needed for good bone and teeth growth.

Children who eat a healthy diet will heal faster if they get a wound (sore) and will recover better from infections. They will also be able to cope with medication better and have improved strength and a greater feeling of wellness.

Take your child for regular check-ups at the clinic

Make sure that any infection is treated as soon as possible to avoid further infections that may require your child to be hospitalised. You can also discuss any concerns you may have with the Healthcare Professional.

The Healthcare Professional at the clinic will do a CD4 blood test and viral load to check if the immune system is still strong. The lower the CD4 count is, the weaker the immune system is.

Children on HIV medication must take their medication every day.

HIV medication works if you take it every day at the same time. This is called being compliant with your medication. Children who are on antiretroviral therapy need someone to make sure they take their medication properly, that is every day and at the same time that the Healthcare Professional instructed. Also make sure your child has had his or her vaccinations according to the recommended schedule.

For more information on HIV and AIDS or about Bankmed's HIV/AIDS Programme, contact 0800 BANKMED (0800 226 5633). All calls are treated with complete confidentiality.

Disclaimer

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Complaints process

You may lodge a complaint or query with Bankmed Medical Scheme directly on 0800 BANKMED (0800 226 5633) or address a complaint in writing directly to the Principal Officer. Should your complaint remain unresolved, you may lodge a formal dispute by following Bankmed Medical Scheme's internal disputes process.

Members, who wish to approach the Council for Medical Schemes for assistance, may do so in writing to: Council for Medical Schemes Complaints Unit, Block A, Eco Glades 2 Office Park, 420 Witch-Hazel Avenue, Eco Park, Centurion 0157 or via e-mail at complaints@medicalschemes.com. Customer Care Centre: 0861 123 267/website www.medicalschemes.com

