



HIV/AIDS – Myths and facts

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.

Overview

There are many stories and ideas regarding HIV and AIDS but the only way to get the true facts is to obtain the information from reliable sources such as the highly trained and skilled people who specialise in the management of HIV and AIDS.

Knowledge and truth about HIV and AIDS is the only way to get rid of any untrue information (or myths) you may have heard. There are several reliable sources of information which are backed by scientific research (these are the facts about HIV and AIDS). These are most readily available from nurses, counsellors and other Healthcare Professionals who specialise in HIV and AIDS.

What is a myth?

A myth is untrue or false information about something. Eventually, if these untruths are not shown to be false or untruthful, everyone starts to believe them. This can be dangerous, as people start believing the wrong information and the truth is ignored.

What is a fact?

A fact is the real, true information about something. A fact will dispel the myth or untrue information.

Some things you may have heard about HIV and AIDS but you're not sure whether they are true (fact) or false (myth).

Myth: My employer can force me to have an HIV test

Fact: Only you have the right to decide whether to go for the test or not. Nobody, not even your healthcare professional, can force you to have the test, nor can anybody conduct the test without your permission.

Myth: My employer can fire me if I am HIV positive

Fact: The outcome of your HIV test is confidential and only you and your healthcare professional will know the results. It's against the law for any healthcare professional to tell anyone the result without your permission. If you decide to tell your employer your result, he or she cannot fire you simply because you are HIV positive. Labour laws protect you. You should also ensure that you are familiar with your company's HIV policy.

Myth: It is safer not to go for an HIV test because you don't want people to find out

Fact: It is important to have an HIV test to establish your HIV status. It gives you the power to take control of your life and make healthy lifestyle changes, whether you test positive or not. It's better to find out you are HIV positive at an early stage because, with the right care and treatment, you can live a long, healthy life. Always remember that your results are confidential, so people will only know if you tell them.

Myth: HIV-positive people don't live longer than three years

Fact: HIV-positive people who take good care of themselves and receive good medical care can live for a long time with HIV. Healthy eating, good emotional support and the right medication can help the person live a long, healthy life.

Myth: You can tell that a person has HIV by looking at them

Fact: People who have HIV may not show any signs for many years. This is particularly true when the HIV positive person looks after their health and follows healthy lifestyle choices.

Myth: HIV is a 'gay' disease and only gay (homosexual) people get HIV and AIDS

Fact: HIV is spread through unprotected sex between gay (homosexual) people as well as people of the opposite sex (heterosexual). The main way the virus is spread in South Africa is through heterosexual sex. HIV does not discriminate against any person, regardless of their race or sexual orientation and socio-economic status.

Myth: You can contract HIV by touching an HIV-positive person

Fact: You cannot contract HIV by touching another person, unless you touch an open wound or are exposed to HIV- infected body fluids such as blood, semen and vaginal secretions and breast milk. HIV is passed from one person to another by:

- Having unprotected sex with an HIV-positive person
- Sharing infected needles and other sharp objects with an HIV-positive person
- Breastfeeding
- Direct contact with HIV-infected blood through open sores on the skin

You cannot get HIV from:

- Sneezing and coughing
- Hugging or touching
- Touching door or toilet handles
- Animal or mosquito bites
- Sharing towels, clothing, cutlery and crockery
- Sharing food

Myth: HIV medication (antiretrovirals) are a cure for HIV and AIDS

Fact: There is no cure for HIV and AIDS. HIV medication only helps slow down the progress of the disease by stopping the virus from spreading in the body. Even though you cannot cure HIV, you can lead a healthy and longer life by managing the virus with the right treatment and looking after yourself both physically and



emotionally.

Myth: There are traditional and herbal medication that can help treat HIV

Fact: The only medication that have been proven to treat HIV and AIDS are antiretrovirals. These medication are registered with the Medicines Control Council, which is the organisation that controls all medication in South Africa. While there is a place in South Africa for traditional medication, there is no evidence that these are effective in the treatment of HIV and AIDS.

Myth: Men are at a lower risk of getting HIV through unprotected sex than women

Fact: Even though there is now a link that HIV is reduced in men who are circumcised, anybody who has unprotected sex with an HIV-positive person is at risk of contracting HIV. HIV does not discriminate against people, regardless of their sex. The only way to reduce your risk of getting HIV is to always use a condom when having sex and by staying in a committed relationship with one partner only.

Myth: You can't contract HIV if you bath or shower after having unprotected sex with an HIV-positive person

Fact: The only way a person can avoid contracting HIV is by not having sex at all or by using a condom when having sex with an HIV-positive person. HIV is passed into the body through body fluids such as blood, semen and vaginal secretions and breast milk. HIV cannot be washed away once the virus has entered the body.

Myth: People with HIV cannot work

Fact: HIV-positive people can carry on working and contribute in a meaningful way to their families and broader society, as long as they look after their health.

Myth: HIV-positive people cannot have sex with their partner

Fact: HIV-positive people can continue to be intimate with their partners. However, to protect against the spread of HIV, they must practice safe sex. This means always using a condom when having sex and staying faithful to one partner only.

Myth: It's better not to speak to children about HIV

Fact: Adults sometimes believe it is better to protect children from the truth, but it shouldn't be so when it comes to HIV and AIDS. Providing children with all the information about HIV and how it's passed on, will help them to protect themselves against the virus, for example starting off by not touching blood on open wounds.

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.

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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

