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Community Health Newsletter: Issue 1 - **Comprehensive HIV Care 2009**
This issue is designed for people who test HIV positive.

GET COMPLETE CARE FOR BETTER HEALTH!

It is important to know your HIV status. You can not tell by looking at your body if you have HIV or AIDS. The only way to know your HIV status is to go for an HIV test at a health clinic. Once you have been tested for HIV and know you are HIV positive, you can take steps to get treatment as needed, take good care of yourself, remain healthy and learn how to protect yourself in the future. There is no cure for HIV and AIDS, but the disease can be managed so that you can have a long, healthy life.

If you test positive for HIV, you should immediately visit the nearest health facility with HIV and AIDS comprehensive care services. At this clinic, a health worker will have a discussion with you about your status and ask you questions about your medical history and then give you a physical examination and do a variety of laboratory tests. This assessment will help the health worker to know the amount of virus in your body and if there are any other illnesses making you sick. With this information, a health worker will know the best way to treat the disease.

IMMUNE SYSTEM AND OPPORTUNISTIC INFECTIONS

No one dies from HIV directly. Your immune system is your body's defense against infection. HIV makes the immune system weak so the body has a hard time fighting HIV or other infections. People with HIV do not have healthy immune systems, so infections can be very dangerous to their bodies. These infections are called opportunistic infections.

It is common for people living with HIV who are not on treatment to get opportunistic infections often. Common opportunistic infections are TB, skin infections, meningitis, pneumonia and cancer. Many of these illnesses are very serious, and they must be treated immediately. However, some can be prevented.

Complete care for HIV positive people includes counseling, psychosocial and nutritional support, prevention and treatment of infections, getting reproductive health care (like contraception and treatment for sexually transmitted infections) as well as HIV drug treatment.

A health worker can help you prevent and treat these opportunistic infections correctly. This is part of the complete care you need if you are HIV positive. Health workers will also tell you how to prevent spreading HIV to others and how to protect yourself from re-infection. They will discuss ways for you to eat healthy, exercise, get support from friends and family and live positively. All the services for complete care for HIV positive people are available at Comprehensive Care Centres (CCCs) in Kenya.

There are drugs that people with HIV can take to help slow down the spread of HIV in their bodies. These drugs are called anti-retrovirals or ARVs. ARVs help the immune system get strong so that it can fight infections. ARVs help reduce the amount of HIV in your blood, but these drugs cannot get rid of the disease completely.

Health workers will decide when it is time for an HIV positive person to start taking ARVs. Not all people who have HIV need ARVs. Only a trained health care worker can decide whether or not a person should start taking ARVs. The health worker makes this decision by measuring the amount of HIV in your body through something called a CD4 count.

Some people may have a very low amount of HIV in their body, which means they are still very healthy and do not need to go on ARVs. Others may have a high amount of HIV in their body, which means they need to take ARVs.

If a health worker recommends you begin taking ARVs, then your medicines will be free. Using ARVs is a very big decision that should be made after thinking a lot about what it means.

- Your health worker will advise you to start treatment, but the decision to take ARVs must be made by you
- You have to take medicine every day for the rest of your life
- You have to visit a health care worker regularly
- You will need support from your friends, family, community, and health workers.

HOW DOES ARVs WORK

- ARVs slow down the spread of HIV so fewer viruses attack the immune system.
- ARVs help the immune system get strong so it can fight off opportunistic infections.
- People on ARVs get sick less often and feel better for longer periods of time.

Anti-retroviral therapy or ART is the process of taking your drugs at all times and monitoring how the drugs impact your health. Health workers can help you manage your ART so that it improves the quality of your life, reduces the number of times you get sick, improves your immune system to fight the disease and reduces the amount of virus in your body.

ARVs have to be taken exactly as a health care worker advises. You should never share ARVs with another HIV person, like your partner. This can be very dangerous and cause the medicine to not work. Stopping and starting the drugs or missing tablets keeps the medicine from working.

If you stop taking ARVs at any time, HIV can build up in your body again and it can become even stronger. As a result, the drugs you were taking before might not be able to fight off this stronger disease and you might have to start using different ARVs, which cost more money and are harder to find.

When taking ARVs you should also eat healthy, exercise, avoid alcohol and smoking, live positively and always practice safe sex. This will help your body to fight the spread of HIV and prevent re-infection of the virus, which can be harmful. Doing these things and taking ARVs will help you to live a long, normal, healthy life.

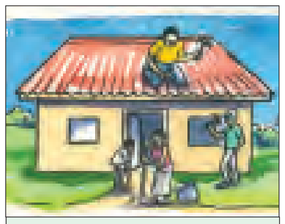
Soon after starting ARVs you will feel better. It is important to continue to visit your health worker so he/she can see how you are feeling and decide if your immune system is getting stronger. Even when you feel better you must still keep taking your ARVs every day. The drugs must be taken for life, otherwise they will not help you.

Take care of yourself

People who have HIV can live for a long time before getting AIDS. But it is important to get tested right away and begin to manage your infection well. Getting complete care will help your body cope with the infection and slow down the spread of infection so you can live a long, healthy life. Visit a CCC today to learn more about how you can manage this disease.

Our body has an immune system that helps to protect us from disease and illness, just as a house protects us from rain and cold.

When the immune system can no longer protect the body from disease, HIV has turned to AIDS. The body becomes like a house that falls apart and can no longer protect us from rain and cold.



ARVs help the body's immune system to get strong so it can keep out diseases. Just like repairing a roof helps keep rain out of a house.

People who take care of themselves by taking ARVs, eating healthy and going to the health facility often will live longer, just as a house that is kept well lasts longer.

QUESTIONS OF THE DAY

Here are some of common questions people ask about ART:

1. Do ARVs cure HIV?
ARVs are medications that can help people with HIV to feel better and live longer, but they do not cure HIV.

2. How long will I have to take ARVs?
ARVs have to be taken for the rest of your life, even after you start to feel better.

3. Is there anything I should not do, eat or drink when taking ARVs?
Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat and eggs. Do not drink coffee or tea. Do not drink alcohol or smoke as it can affect the way the ARVs work in the body.

4. What are the side effects of using ARVs?
Like most medicines, ARVs can have side effects, but side effects can be managed with the help of your doctor. Some people on ARVs have headaches, dry mouth, skin rashes, diarrhoea, anaemia, dizziness, hair loss, tingling in the hands and feet, nausea, vomiting, bad dreams, and feeling tired, sad, or worried. It is important to continue eating and taking the medicines even if you have side effects. If you have any of these, talk with a health care worker about how to treat them. There are ways to help treat side effects so you can feel better. You can also talk with other people who are positive about ways they have found to treat side effects.

5. Do herbal medicines work better than ARVs?
ARVs are the only medicines proven to help treat HIV and AIDS. Research studies prove that taking ARVs will help fight the disease and decrease the amount of HIV in the body. Based on the research that has been done so far, there is no proof that herbal or traditional medicines treat or cure HIV and AIDS. Some traditional medicines may help to treat the symptoms of opportunistic infections, but others may be dangerous and can keep ARVs from working. It is important to talk with a health worker about any medicines you are taking when you are on ARVs.

Tips for telling your children you are HIV positive

After parents test positive for HIV, telling their children about their HIV status is one of their biggest concerns. While it can be very difficult to tell children, it is better to tell them as soon as possible. It is best that children hear about their parent's HIV status from their parent as hearing from others at school or in the community can be especially difficult. It is best to tell children early, while parents are healthy, so they are able to support their children when they have painful and difficult feelings. Once children know, the family can start talking about things openly and dealing with the feelings that come up.

Following the tips listed below may make telling your children easier for you and them:

- Get control over your own emotions and accept your diagnosis before talking with your children.
- Be sure you have support for yourself from friends, family members, counsellors, and others.
- Learn as much as you can about HIV and AIDS so that you will be able to your children's questions.
- Find a quiet time to tell your children that is free from interruptions.
- Try to be as relaxed as possible before the conversation begins. Your children might notice if you are feeling anxious, sad, or angry.
- Be prepared for their reactions. If your children do not react the way you hoped right away, with time, support, and information, they may be more accepting.
- Encourage your children to ask questions as they come up.

Let your children know that you are trying to stay as healthy as you can. Explain things you are doing to stay healthy. For example eating healthy meals, doing exercise, joining a support group, taking ARVs.

Test Babies and Children Early for HIV

Babies and children who are HIV-infected can live healthy lives. It is important for them to be tested early for HIV and to go to a health facility often. Only a test at a health facility can tell if a child is infected with HIV.

Most children born to HIV-infected mothers will not become infected, but some will. Mothers are tested for HIV when they attend antenatal clinics. This is done so that if the mother is HIV positive, steps can be taken to prevent transmission of the virus from the mother to the baby during pregnancy, delivery and breastfeeding. If a mother has tested positive for HIV, it is important to her baby for testing as soon as possible. Testing can be done as early as 6 weeks after birth. Waiting until a child falls ill can be too late. Children's immune systems are not as developed as adults and they can get sick quicker.

A child can get HIV in the following ways:

- A woman who is HIV infected can pass the virus to her child during pregnancy, at the time of birth, or through breastfeeding. Most children born to HIV-infected women will not get HIV. Talk with a health care worker about ways to reduce the risk.
- Through other blood-to-blood contact like sharing sharp objects or other skin piercing instruments like razor blades, needles and circumcision knives.
- If the child is raped or sexually abused by someone who is HIV infected.

When children test positive for HIV, a doctor may suggest they start antiretroviral drugs or ARVs. Most children who start ARVs will get better, if they take the drugs properly. Once children start ARVs:

- Their quality of life will improve a lot
- They will grow and develop well
- They will be better able to fight illnesses

ARVs must be given very carefully to children. Giving a child too little or too much of a drug, means the medicine may not work properly. If drugs are not taken every day, at around the same time, ARVs may no longer work. Children need to go for doctor's visits more often than adults.

Following treatment properly can be difficult with children. It can be helpful to talk with other parents and caregivers to share experiences. For children who are old enough to take ARVs on their own, talk with them about HIV and the importance of following ART properly. Help them to decide when and how to tell others about their status.

Testing babies and children for HIV

Comprehensive care centres (CCC) are the most ideal place to test babies and children for HIV. CCCs have paediatrics clinic days. Visit your nearest health centre for more information.

Know Your Status

It is important for parents to know their status so they can get medicines and support to reduce the risk of HIV transmission to their children, during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding.

How can I tell my children my HIV positive status?

I decided to go for VCT when I heard rumours in my village that my husband was doing many risky activities. I visited the Mukumu health centre and, confirming my worst fears, the result of my HIV test was positive. I still looked healthy so I decided the only weapon for my survival was to keep my status a secret. Soon there were more rumours in the village about my status, but I kept quiet. I was rejected by my husband and my co-wives who felt I had betrayed the family. I vowed to remain strong but was dealt another blow when my two children came home from school one afternoon crying. They were being teased about my status. This made me decide to talk about being HIV positive with my two sons.

I explained to them what I was going through and how I was living positively with HIV. Since then the boys have become very supportive of me. They now help me follow my schedule for taking my ARVs, support me to eat a healthy diet, and we even do regular exercises together when they come from school.

Milca, Tuendelee Psychosocial Group, Iguhu

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How ART Can Change Your Life

A PERSONAL STORY FROM LORAINE, AN HIV-POSITIVE MOTHER

I lost two of my children. They died before celebrating their fourth birthdays. At first, I didn't know that they died because of HIV. The community viewed these deaths as something strange and supernatural. After some time, I became weak and sickly. Someone suggested that I visit a local medicine man for treatment, but the herbs he gave me did not help. I lost my appetite, developed a skin rash and could not support myself. During that time, my husband stopped caring for me and did not support me financially.

With my health situation getting worse, I went to Busia district hospital. There I tested positive for HIV and learned my immune system was very weak. My doctors talked to me, took blood tests and advised me to start antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) immediately. The doctors told me I must take the drugs every day as they said, eat nutritious foods, do light exercise, feel hopeful and visit the health centre whenever I felt sick.

During this time, my mother and children were very helpful, caring for me at the hospital and at home. Their support helped me to live and not give up. They reminded me to take make drugs and made sure that I ate healthy, well balanced meals. I visited the comprehensive care clinic in Busia whenever I had a health problem or felt ill. The doctors reminded me about the importance of taking my medicines exactly as they advised and gave me information about HIV and AIDS that helped me to live positively.

ART has changed my life and made me strong. I know how to take care of my body and stay healthy. I now feel good about my place in the community and my relationship with my husband is better. After being on ARVs for five years, I still feel hopeful when I start my day each morning. My dream is to raise my children and let them understand everything about HIV and AIDS as they grow up.

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I am committed to talking about the importance of knowing your status and promoting safe sex practices. I do not want to see more lives lost in the community to HIV/AIDS. I want people living with HIV to accept ART and I want families and community members to be supportive towards people living with HIV.

SPOTLIGHT

Advice from Community Health Volunteers about ART

MAINTAIN HEALTHY HYGIENE

Anti-retroviral therapy, or ART, does not mean just taking drugs, but it is a package of things that needs to be done like eating well, thinking positively, doing exercise, and maintaining good hygiene. People living with HIV should bathe every day, brush their teeth after meals, wash their hands with soap and water after going to the toilet or before preparing food or eating, and take care when handling pets and animals. Cleanliness keeps germs away that can make you sick

Boniface Angaya, Community Health Volunteer Eshisiru and Shiyunzu Sub-location, Kakamega

LIVE POSITIVELY

If you are a person living with HIV, honour yourself by accepting the condition positively and tell a close friend or family member that you are positive. This will help you manage HIV and AIDS. Emotional support from family members, close friends and relatives is important. A family member or friend who says, "You are part of my family; we will walk the journey together and you can seek assistance any time is necessary," will help reduce stigma and develop strong relationships.

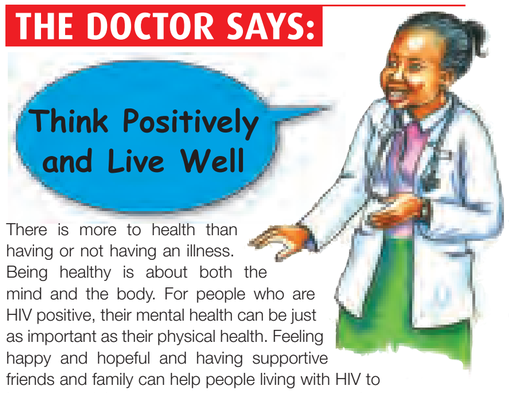
Maximilla Mulongo, Community Health Volunteer, Chwele Sub-location

ACCEPT YOUR STATUS

Taking anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) regularly is the beginning of a healthy life. One can use an alarm, a clock or a radio; or a friend or family member (a child or spouse) to help remind you to take ARVs. I make home visits and monitor progress made by community members at designated times. This practice helps support people to take their ARVs.

Dorris Otieno, Community Health Volunteer, Butere

THE DOCTOR SAYS:



There is more to health than having or not having an illness. Being healthy is about both the mind and the body. For people who are HIV positive, their mental health can be just as important as their physical health. Feeling happy and hopeful and having supportive friends and family can help people living with HIV to take care of themselves, including making healthy choices and deciding to go for medical treatment soon after they fall ill.

Living positively means being free from illness, feeling hopeful, being productive, and having a healthy mind and body. People living with HIV need support to live positively.

When people learn that they are HIV positive, it is normal to have many different thoughts and feelings. Some may feel sad, afraid, worried, ashamed, angry, lonely, or guilty. If people living with HIV can feel good about themselves and have people who understand their challenges, they may be able to accept their status and live their lives with hope. Whenever they fall ill, the feelings may come back, which is why support from friends and family is so important.

Hopeful thoughts, exercise, laughter and good feelings are good for your health. Stress and worry can cause the immune system to not work as well. If people living with HIV can have fewer bad feelings, their immune system may work better - helping to fight HIV and other infections.

How to help people feel better:

- Say and do things that show that you care about and support them
- Encourage them to talk about their feelings
- Listen and show that you want to understand their thoughts and feelings
- Do not judge or blame
- Do not give advice (unless you are asked)

Tips for Eating Healthy

People living with HIV can live productive, healthy lives by taking good care of themselves. This means eating well, getting enough rest and exercise and getting treatment soon for any illnesses or infection. When you know you are infected you should also avoid habits such as smoking and drinking alcohol.

People with HIV need to always eat healthy foods to make the body's immune system stronger.

A healthy diet should include:

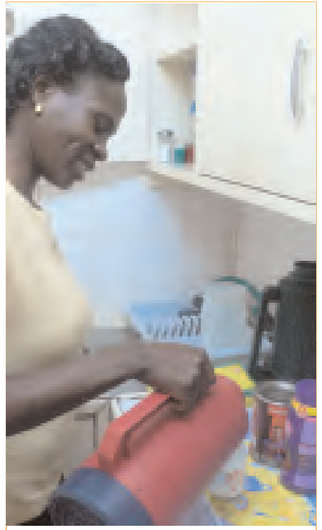
- Animal products, beans and nuts, such as meat, chicken, fish, peanuts, beans, dengu, eggs, milk, soya beans and omena, help the body to be strong.

- Starches and staples such as sweet potatoes, yams, cassava, ugali, wimbi, rice, matoke and porridge give the body energy.

- Fruits and vegetables such as guavas, watermelon,oranges, pineapples, paw paw, mangoes, green leafy vegetables such as mirro, saaka, mrenda, avocado and pumpkins also provide important vitamins that protect the body against infection and improve ones health.

Follow these 8 rules of healthy eating:

1. Eat small meals with foods from each group.
2. Eat with other people as this improves ones mental status and brings a sense of belonging.
3. Always prepare the foods you like in a clean, healthy way.
4. Always wash your hands before and after preparing and eating food to avoid food poisoning
5. Wash food before preparation and raw fruits and vegetables before serving them.
6. Drink a lot of water or juice with your meals and at other times.
7. Also drink a lot of milk if you can afford it.
8. Always eat food soon after it is prepared.



Eating Well

Eating healthy foods is especially important for people living with HIV. Pamela Miheso, who is living positively, shares how eating healthy has greatly improved her health.

Each morning, I take wimbi porridge with a sweet potato. I also eat paw-paw or any fruit in season because it is affordable.

For lunch, I take cooked banana with tsisaaka or lisutsa mixed with eggs to be sure of eating a balanced diet. I boil vegetables and drink the soup. To complete my menu I drink a cup of milk.

For supper, I take mrenda and seveve (pumpkin leaves) that has mirro with rice. I take a fruit after every meal. Avocados, mangoes, paw paws and oranges are my favourites.

WHERE CAN YOU GET ARVs?

Bungoma East
- Friends Lugulu Hospital
- Webuye District Hospita
- Bokoli Sub District Hospital

Bungoma North
- Kimilili Sub District Hospital
- Ndalu Health Centre
- Naitiri Health Centre

Bungoma South
- Bumula Health Centre
- Bungoma District Hospital

Bungoma West
- Chwele District Hospital
- Friends Chwele Hospital
- Kabuchai Health Centre
- Malakisi Health Centre
- Sirisia Sub District Hospital

Bunyala
- Mukhobola Health Centre
- Port Victoria District Hospital

Busia
- Bumala A Health Centre
- Bumala B Health Centre
- Busia District Hospital Ampath
- Busia District Hospital MSF
- Khunyangu Sub District Hospital
- Matayos Health Centre
- Nambale Health Centre

Butere
- Butere District Hospital
- Khwisero Health Centre
- Manyala Sub District Hospital
- Namasoli ACK Mission

Emuhaya
- Coptic Mission Hospital
- Emuhaya District Hospital
- Esiarambatsi Health Centre
- Ipali Health Centre
- Kiima Mission Hospital

Hamisi
- Hamisi District Hospital
- Kaimosi Mission Hospital
- Serem Health Centre
- Tigoi Health Centre

Kakamega Central
- Kakamega PGH

Kakamega East
- St. Elizabeth Mukumu Hospital

Kakamega North
- Kuvasali Sub District Hospital
- Malava District Hospital

Kakamega South
- Bukura Health Centre
- Bushiri Health Centre
- Iguhu Health Centre
- Kambiri Health Centre
- Kilingili Health Centre
- Shibwe Health Centre
- Shikusa GK Prison Dispensary
- Navakholo SDH

Lugari
- Kongoni Health Centre
- Likuyani Sub District Hospital
- Lumakanda District Hospital
- Mabusi Health Centre
- Matete Health Centre
- Mautuma Sub District Hospital

Mt. Elgon
- Mt. Elgon District Hospital

Mumias
- Bungasi Health Centre
- Bukaya Health Centre
- Makunga Health Centre
- Mumias District Hosp.(Matungu)
- St. Marys Hospital

Samia
- Holy Family Nangina Mission H
- Sio Port District Hospital

Teso
- Akichelestis Dispensary
- Alupe Sub District Hospital
- Amukura Mission Hospital
- Angurai Health Centre
- Lukolis Health Centre
- Moding Health Centre
- Teso District Hospital

Vihiga
- Sabatia Health Centre
- Vihiga Health Centre
- Vihiga District Hospital

What is HIV?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. HIV is a virus that is too small to see and it is passed between people through blood and other body fluids. HIV weakens the immune system, making it easier for people to fall sick. When an HIV-positive person becomes sick with many illnesses that do not go away, then he or she is said to have AIDS. AIDS is used to describe the most serious stage of HIV infection, when the body is unable to fight illness and infections.

HIV can be passed between people in three ways::

- Sexual contact with an HIV-infected person.
- Contact with blood from an HIV-infected person, through sharing something that cuts or pierces the skin (needles, knives), an opening in the body such as a cut, or a transfusion.
- HIV-infected mothers to their children (during pregnancy, at the time of birth, or through breastfeeding)

You CANNOT get HIV from every day contact like touching, hugging, talking to, or sharing a home with a person who is HIV infected or has AIDS. There is no risk of HIV transmission when sharing plates, utensils, glasses or towels with an infected person. HIV cannot survive in air, water, or on things people touch.