#KnowTheScore - getting young men in Southern Africa testing for HIV

Testing for HIV gives you the freedom to know your status and live your life. But many people don’t test because they are scared of what a positive result would mean for their future.

Our #KnowTheScore campaign is tackling the misconceptions around what it means to live with HIV today, and how these fears can affect people’s ideas about what they are able to achieve in life.

Reaching out in particular to young men across Southern Africa - a group who tend not to test as much for HIV - we show the story of a young footballer who is worried about the impact an HIV-positive result would have on his life. We show that, whatever the result, your life doesn’t have to change.

What can you do?

You’ve seen our video … so now what can you do?

Spread the word about #KnowTheScore ⚽

We want as many young men as possible to know the facts about HIV so that they feel less scared to go and test. Help us get our message out by sharing these resources:

- Watch and share our #KnowTheScore ⚽ video.
- Read and share our *new* HIV testing factsheet.
- Hear from Mpho, Bandile, Calvin, Chanda, Nagala, James, and Jayden and share their stories!
- Read below more about the benefits of testing and why young men are being left behind by HIV services!

Why test for HIV?

Testing for HIV is an important part of living a happy and healthy life, whatever the results. We know the prospect of an HIV-positive diagnosis can frighten people, but not knowing your status can be worse for your physical and mental health – and means you could pass HIV onto your sexual partners.

In fact, it is being HIV-positive and unaware of your status that will affect your life the most. It may well result in you becoming sick, to the point where you will be unable to do the things that make you happy - not because you are HIV-positive, but because you are too scared to know your status and to get the treatment you need.
HIV treatment (known as antiretroviral treatment) works so well these days that you can stay completely healthy with the same life expectancy as HIV-negative people – as long as you are diagnosed early and take your treatment as your doctor says.

Hmm, where do I start? I am a sexually active guy, but I never thought I would get HIV[...] Then I tested positive, and the numbness crept in[...] I immediately started my treatment, and boy I have to tell you, I never experienced any sort of setback, have never been sick, and now I am even undetectable.

That’s Mpho, from South Africa – you can read more of his story here.

What was important for Mpho was that he was diagnosed early. Regular testing for HIV, or testing as soon as you feel you’ve put yourself at risk, will mean that you can catch HIV early and before it has a chance to damage your immune system and make you feel ill. If you do test positive, keep taking your treatment and talk to those around you – whether it be friends, support groups, or a health worker – they are there to support you in living well!

So all those things you love to do – whether it’s playing football, hanging out with your friends or partner – HIV really needn’t affect the path you choose in your life.

And if you’re diagnosed as HIV-negative, well, you get the peace of mind you need to continue with life, without the stress of not knowing your status.

Waiting for my results, I kept crying and walking around. I couldn't sit down until I got my test results back. I had convinced myself I had HIV, but my tests came back negative!

Read more of Bandile from Zambia’s story here.

Bandile ended up being so worried that he couldn’t carry on his normal life but, in the end, he needn’t have stressed at all. Knowing that he is HIV-negative meant that he could finally go back to doing the things he loved, safe with the knowledge of how to protect himself from HIV in the future. So start making the habit that will save or change your life and test for HIV today.

Why young men?
In sub-Saharan Africa, men living with HIV are less likely to know their status, less likely to be on treatment and less likely to be virally suppressed. As a result, death rates are considerably higher than they should be.

Every sexually active young person – girl or guy – should make HIV testing a regular part of their sexual health routine! But there's a lot of evidence out there that tells us that young men are not testing for HIV as much as women are.

There are a few reasons for this. Women are more likely to visit a health centre to talk about contraceptives, or when they get pregnant, meaning health centres can be full of women which may be daunting for young men. Men may not be able to visit health centres because of their working hours – and often don’t feel the need to go unless they become very ill. Men may also avoid testing because of a lack of knowledge and fear of what an HIV diagnosis will mean for their life.

Across sub-Saharan Africa, men living with HIV are less likely to know their status, less likely to be on HIV treatment and less likely to be virally suppressed. And as a result, death rates are considerably higher than they should be. But remember – it doesn’t have to be this way!

HELP US HELP OTHERS

Avert.org is helping to prevent the spread of HIV and improve sexual health by giving people trusted, up-to-date information.

We provide all this for FREE, but it takes time and money to keep Avert.org going.

Can you support us and protect our future?

Every contribution helps, no matter how small.

PLEASE DONATE NOW