

WE ARE RESPONSIBLE

South Africans get behind government's testing campaign

A SNAP survey on the streets of Joburg shows that we are taking responsibility and getting behind the government's HIV testing and counselling – or HCT – campaign, which aims to test 15 million South Africans by June 2011.

■ Theo Matleng (28) of Kagiso: "Yes, I support the campaign. A lot of us are dying of this HIV thing and we are ignorant about the disease . . ."

"We don't use condoms and when we drink we take chances. It's sad to see young people dying. It's better to know your status – and your partner's."

■ Catherine Maboya (53) of Tembisa: "I've no idea about the campaign, but yes, I support it. It's a good idea for people to know their HIV status."

■ Naftally Musweswe (32) of Randburg: "They (government) want to know about everyone's HIV status, and I support it."

"It's very difficult to know if people are healthy or not, and the only way to find out is to test people."

■ Vuyo Mbolekwana (27) of Pretoria: "I support it. They (government) wants the next generation not to get Aids, like us."

■ Helen Mutshekwa (26) of Sandton: "I think the whole point of testing is to get the (HIV prevalence) statistics right . . . But look around, they're not here. I support the campaign but I'd like to see it."

■ Soneni Dube (24) of Sandton: "I have no idea about the campaign. I wasn't aware of it. Maybe they're not publicising it enough. I'm concerned because people often don't want to know their status – what's the incentive to test?"



Naftally Musweswe supports the HIV testing campaign.



Helen Mutshekwa feels the campaign can produce the statistics we need.



Catherine Maboya says the campaign is a good idea.



Soneni Dube thinks government must get better marketing for the campaign.



Theo Matleng thinks it's better to know your HIV status.



Vuyo Mbolekwana believes responsible people will protect the next generation.

Brothers turn up in numbers to be tested

PEOPLE are turning out in big numbers to be tested for HIV in the Thabo Mofotsanyana district of the QwaQwa region in the Free State.

Merriam Somtjato, the district's co-ordinator for sexually transmitted infections, HIV and prevention of mother-to-child transmission, said government's ambitious HIV counselling and testing – or HCT – campaign – which aims to test 15-million South Africans by June 2011 – has been taken to heart in her district.

All people were involved, she said, and hospitals, mobile clinics, the district Aids council, the provincial authorities and others had been galvanised into collective action.

"Testing has become the language of the day. The campaign has brought everyone together. Everybody has a role to play," she said.

And this spirit of co-operation has not only had positive spin-offs for the HCT campaign. It has also united health workers in other areas of HIV prevention and treatment, such as medical male circumcision and the roll-out of anti-retroviral treatment.

Somtjato said the district is lagging behind its current testing target of



A patient's finger is pricked during an HIV test.

97 000 people but 79 000 people have already been tested – many of whom may not have taken an HIV test otherwise – and the campaign is "pushing forward regardless".

Particularly successful has been the comprehensive outreach campaign to the district's various communities. It informs people of the campaign and encourages them to test. Health workers are visiting farms, shops, industrial areas and churches to drum up support.

"The outreach is working very well. It's really supported our campaign," she said, adding that the community has responded particularly well to the HCT campaign coming to them, in-

stead of them having to go to a clinic to be tested.

"The community is positive. People enjoy us coming to them and they are coming to be tested in numbers – especially men."

But Somtjato said it was noticeable that people tend to come for tests as individuals, and not with their intimate partners. This is a problem as two partners may not have the same HIV status, and they cannot be counselled together before testing – a person cannot guess their partner's test results will be the same as their own HIV status.

"We advise them to get tested for HIV together," she said.

A new start for you and your partner

"MEN should take the test so that they can take charge of their health, said Ncamsile Nhlabathi, the HIV Counselling and Testing – or HCT – manager for New Start, part of the Society for Family Health.

Fewer men in South Africa test for HIV and when they do, it's sometimes too late . . .

Some men use their partner's status as their own status. So if a man's partner tests positive they will think that they are positive too. If their partner tests negative they think they are also negative, she said.

"A strong focus for New Start is the testing of men and couples and, said Nhlabathi, it is very important that men start showing more leadership – in more ways than one. People don't understand that your test results may not match your partner's and that it is important for both partners to test for HIV," she said.

Men should start talking about HIV testing because their partners may be too afraid to talk about it with them. Being able to speak openly to each other about taking an HIV test makes taking the test easier.

It is then also easier for the couple to test together and be open about their results. By testing together, they can be counselled on their relationship if they should they test positive or have different test results.

New Start provides HIV testing to the public in all nine provinces. You can test at a New Start testing offices for R25. You can also test free of charge at one of their community event at taxi ranks, shopping malls and sports stadiums.

To find out more about New Start, please call 011 833 0420 or visit www.newstart.co.za – where you can also send e-mails to New Start.

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