

HIV TREATMENT FOR BABIES AND CHILDREN

Why has this tool been produced?

To support parents and caregivers of infants and children aged under 5 years, by providing clear and accurate information about HIV treatment.

Who is it for?

Peer educators, community health workers, treatment advocates or anyone interacting regularly with parents and caregivers who are living with, affected by or concerned about HIV.

How can you use it?

As a guide for community awareness-raising or self-help group discussions, or as a handy source of information for individual counselling sessions.

RIGHTS

What rights do my child and I have to receive HIV services?

No matter where you live, you and your child have the right to HIV testing and (if you need it) to HIV treatment and care.



o You and your child have the right to be treated with respect and fairness at all times, including when you go to health care providers for HIV testing, treatment and care.



o It is your child's right to be tested, and your right and responsibility as a parent to make sure that it happens.



o Whether you are HIV positive or negative, both you and your child have the right to dignity and to the best possible health throughout your lives.



TESTING

When should I take my baby for HIV testing?

If you are a mother living with HIV, your baby should be tested for HIV soon after birth.



o Depending on where you live and whether you are breastfeeding, testing may be done at birth, at 4 -6 weeks, at 9 months and at 18 months.



o It is very important to get your baby tested and if the baby's test is positive at any time, to start them on treatment as soon as possible.



o Even if all your baby's tests have been negative, it is important to do the final test at 18 months of age once the baby is no longer breastfeeding.



BREASTFEEDING

What should I do about breastfeeding?

If you are living with HIV and you are breastfeeding your baby, keep taking your HIV treatment every day without fail.



- Remember not to mix feed - give your baby only breast milk during the first 6 months of life. Mix feeding, or giving both breast milk and water, formula or other foods in the first 6 months can increase your baby's risk of getting HIV.



- After 6 months, you can slowly cut down on breastfeeding and give more solid foods.



- Depending on where you live, you may be advised to use formula to feed your baby.



- If you always have access to formula and clean, boiled water, you should not breastfeed and should give formula instead.



- As every person's situation is different, it is best to talk to a health care worker about how you plan to feed your baby and get specific advice.



TREATMENT

Why is HIV treatment important for babies and children? What are the options?

There are effective and safe treatments for babies and children living with HIV. Treatment can keep your child healthy and help them lead a normal life with HIV.



- Not treating a baby or young child who has been diagnosed with HIV can be very dangerous for them.



- The earlier treatment is started, the better for your child. Treatment can help your child stay healthy with HIV.

- HIV treatment for children is now available at many clinics and hospitals, so you no longer need to travel far to look after your child properly.



- Treatments for babies are better now than in the past. Your health care worker can help you find the right type of treatment for your child.



- HIV medicines for children come in many types including syrups, tablets, and chewable tablets. Not all drugs are available in all forms, and some may not be available where you live.



- Once your child has started treatment, it is important that they take it every day. Your health care worker will explain how much of the drug (the dose) you need give your child. This will change as your child grows and gets heavier.



- Children need to have good nutrition in order to get the most benefit from their treatment.



TAKING HIV MEDICINE

My child doesn't want to take their HIV medicine. What can I do?

You can make it easier for your child to stick to taking their treatment, by praising them, making it part of the daily routine, and setting a good example.

- Sometimes children can find it difficult to understand why they need to take medication every day. Talking to your child about their treatment can help them to accept it. Depending on your child's age, you can decide how much detail to go into.
- Encourage your child to ask questions and let them know that they can always speak to you if they are worried or confused. Be prepared to answer any questions your child may have by learning more about how their treatment works.
- Remember that many other parents have children with HIV. If you know other families affected by HIV, you could ask them for tips.



- There are lots of things you can do to make it easier for your child to stick to taking their treatment, such as:



- Make the medicine part of your child's daily routine - just like washing, brushing teeth, or getting ready for bed. This will help it to feel more normal.
- Praise or reward your child after they have taken their medicine.
- If you are also on treatment, take it at the same time as your child to set a good example.
- Talk to them to understand why they don't like taking their treatment, so you can better support them. For example, they may find pills difficult to swallow, or dislike like the taste of a liquid drug.



- It is also important to be aware of possible side-effects of the drugs your child is taking and to look out for them. If you think your child is experiencing side-effects, talk to your healthcare provider.

- Your child may need more support as they get older, particularly when they become a teenager.

TALKING ABOUT HIV

How can I talk to my child about HIV?

Telling a child that they have HIV should be done over time, giving them information at the level they can understand, depending on their age.

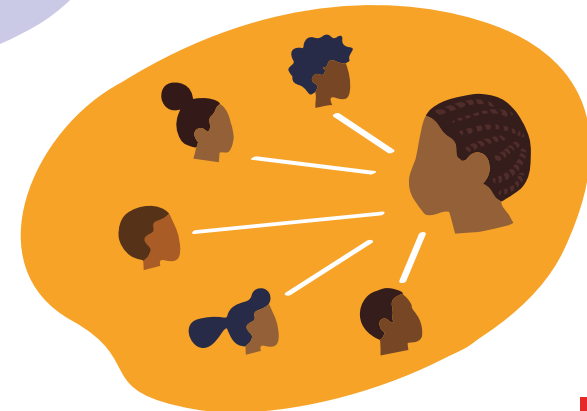
- Building a strong relationship with your child is important. Good communication generally (not just about HIV) is part of this - for example, listening to them, and giving them praise and encouragement.
- It can be difficult to decide how much information to give children about HIV. Every child is different, and every parent is different, so there isn't necessarily a 'right' way to tell your child that they, or you, have HIV.



- Often, telling a child that they have HIV can take many months or even years as their understanding grows. Always give them information at the level they can understand, depending on their age. Children may have questions about why they are taking treatment, or why they have to go to the clinic, and this can present an opportunity to give information and offer reassurance.

- Talking to other parents and a health care provider at your child's clinic can help you think about what you might like to do and when.

- Peer support is important for your child, so help them to join a support group or club specifically for children.



STIGMA

I fear what others might say or do if I take my child for treatment. What should I do?

Do not let fear of people's reactions cause you to avoid health care for yourself or your child. Reach out to your local HIV group for support.

It is important to create a support system for you and your child. This will help you feel better able to deal with stigma, either from others or within yourself.

Avoiding health care will definitely be harmful for you and your child.

If you or your child are treated badly or unfairly by a health care worker, take action and seek help from the community of people living with HIV around you.



COVID-19

What can I do to reduce the risk of COVID for myself and my child?

Living with HIV can increase your risk of COVID. Follow all the usual safety measures and continue your own and your child's HIV treatment.



Living with HIV can make you and your child more at risk of illness with COVID. As well as the usual safety measures (face covering, handwashing, physical distancing) it is important that you continue your own and your child's treatment so that both of you can stay strong and healthy.



Ask for more than one month's supply of your and your child's medicine



There are ways to cope with the COVID situation and restrictions - for example, asking for more than one month's supply of your and your child's medicine (multi-month dispensing) to reduce the number of visits you need to make.