

MEDIA RELEASE

Health campaign offers couples the chance to GIVE THE GREATEST GIFT

Nothing more precious than trust and concern for your loved one's wellbeing

South Africans can boast that HIV testing has become part of our national way of life. Many of us take an HIV test every year and this has been central to our ability, as a country, to reduce the drastic effects of the HIV epidemic.

HIV counselling and testing (HCT) for couples is an important form of HIV testing. Like other forms of HCT, couples testing is a road to better support and communication and to prompt ARV treatment, where needed. In addition, it is an opportunity to build love and trust between partners.

The New Start health programme brings a special couples' HCT campaign into the heart Welkom later this month, setting up mobile testing units in busy shopping areas.

Branded "love taxis" will be available to shuttle couples from residential areas to the testing sites.

The way New Start sees it, the campaign offers people in intimate relationships the opportunity to "give your partner the *greatest* gift".

New Start's Senior Programme Manager, Ncamsile Nhlabathi, explains: "The most valuable things in the world are things we cannot buy – good health, the respect and love of our partners, and the ability to care for our children.

"Knowing our HIV status helps us safeguard our health, make better lifestyle choices and be there, as parents, to raise our children. If you and your partner agree to go together and take an HIV test you are truly doing something of huge value for each other and for your family."

The New Start testing units will be available in Welkom:

- At Central Park every day from Friday 15 August to Friday 22 August excluding Sundays between 9:00 and 17:30 on weekdays and 9:00 and 17:00 on Saturdays
- At Goldfields Mall from Saturday 23 August to Saturday 30 August excluding Sundays between 9:00 and 17:30 on weekdays and 9:00 and 17:00 on Saturdays

How couples HIV testing works

Both individuals who form a "couple" come together to the HCT service. Couples may be married or unmarried, heterosexual or same-sex, and long-established or newly formed.

Both partners see the same counsellor at the same time and this offers them an opportunity to share some of their concerns and questions about HIV.

After this they both take an HIV test.

They then receive their results together from the counsellor who provides a safe environment for them to talk about their results and the way forward. The counsellor can also provide useful information that is appropriate to their results.

The couples HCT service is free of charge and is provided by experienced counsellors and healthcare workers from the New Start centres.

Where individuals test positive for HIV, New Start can immediately perform an additional test (known as a CD4 count) to see how far the infection has progressed and advise them if they need ARV treatment immediately or at a later stage.

“We always try and offer a service that goes beyond the HIV test itself so that people feel capable of taking care of themselves in future, regardless of whether they test negative or positive,” says Ncamsile Nhlabathi. “With couples testing, our counsellors are also able to assist partners together to deal with the emotional impact of one or both of them testing positive. We recognise that couples are all too often left to manage these difficult situations on their own.”

Distributed by the New Start programme and its parent-body, the Society for Family Health.

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Note to editors

The New Start programme was developed by Society for Family Health (SFH) in partnership with the government of South Africa and operates four centres that focus on HIV prevention. New Start is funded by the US President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). SFH is a registered not for profit organisation and is an affiliate of Population Services International (PSI), a global social marketing organisation.