

Key Messages for the Know Your Status Campaign

What does Know Your Status mean?

Know Your Status (KYS) is a slogan used to encourage every male and female above age 12 in Lesotho to learn his or her HIV status through confidential HIV testing and counselling. KYS means taking control of one's life and benefiting from services and support available in the community to protect against HIV infection, or to care and support those already infected. Knowing one's HIV status is a basic human right.

Why did Lesotho launching Know Your Status campaign?

The HIV and AIDS pandemic has reached devastating proportions in Lesotho, with one in three Basotho already infected. However, still too many people are unaware of their HIV status. This means that those who are already infected will continue, unknowingly, to infect others, and may not be taking care of their health in the best manner. Those who are already infected can greatly benefit from early knowledge of their HIV status, and access to early care and support. Those who are HIV negative will receive prevention and support services to help them remain uninfected.

How will Lesotho carry out its Know Your Status campaign?

Lesotho will be the first country in the world to offer HIV testing and counselling to every male and female above age 12 in the country. 3,600 community health workers will be trained to do a simple and quick HIV test that involves pricking a finger to get a drop of blood for testing. They will also be trained in educating communities about safer sex and where to get HIV prevention and care services. Five other selected community members per village will be trained to provide on-going education and counselling.

How can every male and females above age 12 be reached?

Lesotho has a successful history of carrying out vaccinations house-to-house. This same approach will be used to offer HIV testing and counselling to all Basotho. Group education will be carried out in all villages. Those who request individual counselling will be provided with this service. Testers will then provide HIV testing and post-test counselling to every individual. Communities can choose to have HIV testing and counselling carried out house-to-house. Those who don't want to be tested in their home will be offered other options (e.g. nearest HIV testing service point).

Who will decide how and when HIV testing and counselling will be carried out in a particular Basotho community?

The community itself will decide. Each village chief will call a PITSO for the whole community explaining the objectives of the KYS campaign. Community councillor secretaries will then gather a group of local stakeholders, chosen by their peers, who will be offered a variety of options on how testing and counselling, might be carried out in their village. They will choose the option that they prefer and call a community conversation with village members to further discuss and reach consensus. This information will be transmitted back to district and national authorities who will plan for the actual testing and counselling.

What are the options of who to offer HIV testing and counselling in your community?

- One option is for communities to be tested by community health workers from that come from within or from an outside community.
- The other options include receiving HIV testing and counselling services from a mobile unit
- A third option is for individual members of the community to seek HIV testing from their health care providers or going to a voluntary counselling and testing centre.

How will the community be prepared for the HIV testing and counselling?

Following the PITSO and community conversations, group education sessions will be held in every village focusing on general information about HIV& AIDS, the benefits of protecting oneself from acquiring HIV, and if positive, of early knowledge of HIV status, and information about where those who are tested can go for follow-up services, including antiretroviral therapy and positive prevention. Following the group education session, those who wish to be tested will go to a trained counsellor and tester.

What if someone doesn't want to be tested and counselled?

That is his or her absolute right. This HIV testing and counselling campaign offers everyone a chance to be tested and counselled, it never imposes this service. Testing and Counselling will only be provided with the informed consent of the person receiving the test.

Once community members are tested and counselled, what happens next?

Lesotho is working hard to ensure that every health centre in the country, as well as hospitals, will be able to provide essential prevention, care and treatment services to every person in need. Community-level HIV prevention programs are also being dramatically increased to help keep HIV-negative Basotho maintain their negative status through condom use, being faithful, or through abstinence. Currently, 70% of Basotho are HIV negative and government is committed to helping them stay that way. To help people who are HIV positive, doctors, nurses and lay personnel are being trained, and the necessary drugs used to treat people with HIV, called antiretroviral therapy or ART, is becoming increasingly available.

But these services aren't available everywhere yet, so why test everyone now?

The KYS campaign will be carried out first in those communities where essential prevention, care and treatment services are already available. The village level testing and counselling will be carried out in a staggered fashion. The house-to-house campaign will be carried out in those villages within the catchment area of the health centre only when post-test prevention, treatment, and care services are available.

Does this mean the VCT centres and HIV testing and counselling now available in hospitals and clinics will no longer exist?

On the contrary, they are being strengthened. Soon, every nurse and doctor in Lesotho will be trained on how to administer an HIV test as a routine part of health care. Women seeking antenatal care will be routinely offered HIV testing and counselling. Anyone being treated for tuberculosis or a sexually transmitted infection will automatically be offered an HIV test. At the same time, each person will still have the option of seeking an HIV test and counselling in stand-alone VCT centres.

Will this campaign continue forever?

No, offering HIV testing and counselling to all males and females above age 12 in an entire country and then providing the service to individuals who decide they want it is very expensive and challenging and cannot be carried out often. After this campaign, emphasis must

lie with continuing to strengthen HIV prevention, care, and treatment programs. Individuals who test negative will be encouraged to seek voluntary counselling and testing if they may have been exposed to HIV, and they will be routinely offered an HIV test and counselling when they visit health care centres for other purposes. Opportunities to know one's HIV status will continue and be expanded.

What happens after this campaign finishes in two years?

By this time, every man, woman and adolescent in Lesotho will have been offered an HIV test and most will know his or her status. Those in need of care and treatment will be accessing services. Those who are negative will receive continuous support, at the community level, to remain negative. Individuals will be encouraged to seek HIV testing and counselling in health centres and at VCT sites as needed. The community structures must continue to support dialogue and discussion to ensure that every Basotho can live free of fear, stigma and discrimination and exercise their full rights to HIV AIDS prevention, care and treatment.