

People most at risk of HIV

# Hurdles to access HIV services

STAR HEALTH DESK

Sex workers, drug users, people in prison, men who have sex with men and transgender people are at higher risk of HIV than the general population — a risk that is heightened if the person is young. However, most of these people at risk of HIV are not getting the health services they need. Failure to provide adequate HIV services for the key groups threatens global progress on the HIV response, warns World Health Organisation (WHO).

These people are most at risk of HIV infection yet are least likely to have access to HIV prevention, testing and treatment services. In many countries they are left out of national HIV plans, and discriminatory laws and policies are major barriers to access.

WHO has recently released "Consolidated guidelines on HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for key populations" that outline steps for countries to reduce new HIV infections and increase access to HIV testing, treatment and care for these five key populations. WHO also recommends countries need to remove the legal and social barriers that prevent many people from accessing services.

For the first time, WHO strongly recommends men who



have sex with men and not yet infected, to consider taking antiretroviral medicines as an additional method of preventing HIV infection medically called pre-exposure prophylaxis alongside the use of condoms.

Rates of HIV infection among men who have sex with men remain high almost everywhere and new prevention options are urgently needed.

Modelling estimates that, globally, 20-25% reductions in HIV incidence among men who have sex with men could be achieved through pre-exposure prophylaxis, averting up to 1 million new infections among this group over 10 years. Studies indicate that women sex workers are 14 times more likely to have HIV than other women, men who have sex with men are 19

times more likely to have HIV than the general population, and transgender women are almost 50 times more likely to have HIV than other adults. For people who inject drugs, studies show the risks of HIV infection can be also 50 times higher than the general population.

None of these people live in isolation and failure to provide services to the people who are at

greatest risk of HIV jeopardizes further progress against the global epidemic and threatens the health and wellbeing of individuals, their families and the broader community.

There are still significant gaps in addressing their needs in national HIV plans. Globally, just 70% of countries surveyed explicitly address the needs of men who have sex with men and sex workers, while the figure for injecting drug users was 40%. Transgender people are rarely mentioned in HIV plans. And even where policies exist on paper, it is hard for people to access services that can help them.

These new guidelines highlighted comprehensive HIV packages for prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care for the five key populations and address specific issues and needs of adolescents from these groups. These include measures to better manage sexual and reproductive health, mental health and co-infections such as tuberculosis and hepatitis. They highlight the need for needle and syringe and opioid substitution therapy programmes and include recommendations for treatment of overdose in the community.

Source: World Health Organisation

## RAMADAN RIDDLES

### Answer to frequently asked questions

**Q. I am on regular medication. Can I still fast?**  
If the medicine needs to be taken during fasting, do not fast. If this medication is required as treatment for a short illness, you can compensate for missed fasts by fasting on other days when you are well. If you are on long-term medication then you could talk to your doctor about whether you could change your medication, so that you can take it outside the time of the fast. If your disease is unstable, or poorly controlled, do not fast.

**Q. Can a Muslim patient take tablets, have injections or use patches while fasting?**

Taking tablets breaks the fast. However, injections, patches, eardrops and eyedrops do not break the fast as they are not considered to be food and drink (though there are differences of opinion among Muslim scholars on these issues). Islamic law says sick people should not fast.

**Q. Does a breastfeeding woman have to fast?**  
No. Islamic law says a breastfeeding woman does not have to fast. Missed fasts must be compensated for by fasting at a later date, or fidyah, once breastfeeding has stopped.

Source: National Health Service, UK

## Fruit Facts

### Health benefits of papaya

Papaya is a delicious tropical fruit that has been enjoyed lavishly by people as a part of cuisines and salads. It has a great taste, mouthwatering flavor and great health benefits.

**1. Digestion:** Papayas contain an enzyme called papain that aids in digestion and can also be used as a meat tenderiser. Its high fiber and water content, both of which help to prevent constipation and promote regularity and a healthy digestive tract.

**2. Anti-ageing:** The antioxidants in papaya help in controlling premature ageing. This quality of the papaya helps you to get a younger look.

**3. Heart disease:** The fiber, potassium and vitamin content in papaya all help to ward off heart disease. It also helps lower blood cholesterol levels and in return help reduce fat buildup in artery to heart and prevent heart attack.

**4. Age-related macular degeneration:** The antioxidant zeaxanthin, found in papaya, filters out harmful blue light rays and is thought to play a protective role in eye health and possibly ward off damage from Age-related macular degeneration that leads to blindness.

**5. Skin and healing:** When used topically, mashed papaya appears to be beneficial for promoting wound healing and preventing infection of burned areas. Researchers believe that the proteolytic enzymes chymopapain and papain in papaya are responsible for its beneficial effects.

**6. Inflammation:** The choline is a very important and versatile nutrient in papayas that aids our bodies in sleep, muscle movement, learning and memory. Choline also helps to maintain the structure of cellular membranes, aids in the transmission of nerve impulses, assists in the absorption of fat and reduces chronic inflammation.



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## HEALTH bulletin

### Pelvic exercises for men, too

Kegel exercises have long been considered women's work. Because they tone the pelvic floor muscles that support the uterus, doctors encourage women to do them during pregnancy and continue them for life. Done for a few minutes a day, Kegels can ease childbirth, help with recovery, prevent incontinence — even improve your sex life.

But Kegels are not just for women anymore. Pelvic floor exercises can help treat incontinence and perhaps sexual dysfunction in men, too, studies have found. Now the rush is on to persuade middle-aged men to get on the bandwagon.

Pelvic muscles are mostly used for sexual and urinary function. Thus strengthening those would help boost their function. But unlike cardio exercised that improve your circulation, exercise to strengthen pelvic floor is often neglected.

Men have the same network of pelvic floor muscles that women do, extending like a hammock from the tailbone to the pubic bone. The muscles support the back, abdomen, bladder and bowel, and help maintain fecal and urinary continence. In men, these muscles surround the base of the penis; they are activated during erection, orgasm and ejaculation, and are responsible for the surge of blood flow to the penis.

Like all muscles, these weaken with age. In order to strengthen them, men are told to tighten the muscles they might normally use to cut off the flow of urine midstream or prevent passing gas in a closed space. The contractions are held for a few seconds, then released, with the



motion repeated 10 to 15 times for each workout.

While some proponents believe Kegels can enhance erections and orgasms, there's little evidence to support the claim. But clinical trials have found they can be helpful for men with one of the most common sexual disorders, premature ejaculation. And some trials suggest Kegels may help restore potency in men with erectile dysfunction. Some even say that it is as good as Viagra, without the costs and the side effects.

Studies showing that Kegels can hasten recovery from prostate surgery have been so convincing that surgeons now routinely recommend patients start Kegels before or shortly after the surgery. In one clinical trial of men about to undergo prostate

surgery, patients were randomly assigned to start doing Kegels before the operation or to get standard care without exercises.

The American Urological Association also recommends Kegels, along with other behavioral modifications, for both men and women who have overactive bladders. Men with severe back pain should avoid Kegels, however, and anyone who has undergone surgery should consult their doctor. While many women have long experience with Kegel exercises, doctors find many men initially are baffled by them. Some have trouble simply locating the appropriate muscles. Simply it is the area you sit on when you are sitting on a horse.

Source: The New York Times

### Surgery soon after stroke can be risky

People who have had a stroke face a significantly higher risk of serious complications if they have an elective surgery during the nine months following their stroke, according to a new study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. The sooner it is after the stroke, the greater the risk.

The odds of another stroke, heart attack or cardiovascular death are 14 times higher for people who have elective surgery within three months of a stroke, the study found.

### Spoon measurements behind many child drug-dosing errors

Using a teaspoon or tablespoon to administer kids' medications can often lead to medication dosing errors, a new study published in the recent issue of Paediatrics reports.

Teaspoon- or tablespoon-based medicine instructions doubled a parent's chances of incorrectly measuring the intended dosage, and also doubled the risk they would not accurately follow the doctor's prescription, the study authors found.



## Knowing for better living

### In Bangladesh...

Only heart diseases account for 12.5% of all hospital deaths!

Check your blood pressure regularly

Check your diabetes regularly

Control your body weight

Avoid smoking

Exercise regularly

Consult your Doctor



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