

MEDIA RELEASE:  
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## **KZN Department of Health implements HIV 'Test and Treat' policy**

KWAZULU-Natal has initiated its first HIV patient on antiretroviral treatment (ART) under the new “Test and Treat” policy, which came into effect today, 01 September 2016.

After testing positive, the male patient, who is in his 20s, was counselled by KwaZulu-Natal Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo, as well as nurses at KwaDabeka Community Health Centre this afternoon.

The new policy is in line with the World Health Organization's guidelines that the urgent commencement of treatment for people who are HIV positive – regardless of their CD4 Count - is extremely beneficial.

National Minister of Health Dr Aaron Motsoaledi announced during his budget speech in May this year that from 1 September South Africa will implement the new WHO guidelines. What does this mean for patients?

Those that currently are eligible to be initiated at CD<500 can now be treated regardless of their CD4 levels. Government has, on the basis of research evidence, already removed CD4 as an eligibility criterion for HIV+ pregnant women, children under 5 years of age as well as HIV and TB co-infected patients over the past few years. This new policy extends this to all people living with HIV.

According to the National Department of Health, implementation of the “Test and Treat” policy will contribute to the National Development Plan goal of increasing life expectancy to at least 70 years by 2030 – people diagnosed with HIV can also live long and healthy lives once they are on ARV medication.

In welcoming the new policy, KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo said: “The National Department of Health is aware that this announcement will result in more HIV positive people accessing Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) services, which may lead to congestion and increased waiting times at health facilities.

“In order to decrease the burden on both patients and health facilities, the Department has initiated a process of decanting stable patients, those that do not need to see a nurse or doctor more than once a year, into support groups and into the chronic medicine dispensing and distribution system through which patients can designate where their medication should be sent to, closer to their homes. This means that patients who do not have to see their health worker, need not come to the clinic to collect their medication as it will be sent to a point close to their homes.

MEC Dhlomo said KwaZulu-Natal is ready to implement Test and Treat. (Test and Treat Audio Message: [English](#) / [isiZulu](#) )

“We are in a good position because we have scores of nurses who are trained in the Nurse-

Initiated Management of Antiretroviral Treatment (NIMART), as the enormity of the task at hand is such that we cannot only rely on doctors to provide ART. The NIMART-trained nurses are available throughout the province.”

MEC Dhlomo also called upon all patients who tested HIV positive in the past but did not receive treatment, due to being below the previous CD4 count threshold of 500, or for other reasons, to come forward so that they can be initiated.

He urged the public to get tested for HIV at least once a year, so that people who test positive can be initiated on treatment. To those who are not yet infected, the MEC’s message was clear: keep it that way, by using condoms during every episode of sex, while combining this with medical male circumcision.

“Our message is that diseases must be prevented, because prevention is better than cure. Out of 3,4 million people who are HIV positive countrywide, 1,1 million are in KZN. What we are saying is that there must be no new infections because we as a department have programmes and services such as free condoms to help you not get infected. To those who are infected, we are saying please do not infect others. As we test and treat, we must make sure there are no other new infections that are coming into the pool,” he said.

ENDS

Issued by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health