

# Opinions on government introduction of mandatory HIV testing

Should there be mandatory testing for HIV in Malawi? by Thengo Kavinya

There are a number of laws around the world that are designed to compel people to take HIV tests, for example laws which are meant to prevent the spread of the virus to newborns. With an estimated one million Malawians currently living with virus that causes AIDS, one of the biggest challenges our nation is facing is that of stopping the spread of HIV. It is actually against this background that government and its partners have come up with numerous strategies aimed at fighting against the pandemic. One of them is the introduction of mandatory HIV tests among pregnant women in government hospitals. The government of Malawi intends to further introduce mandatory tests to certain sections of society including such as those wishing to enter marriage, sex workers, people joining security organs of the state, pregnant women and blood donors. The same legislation also criminalizes what it calls deliberate transmission of HIV to other people. The practice of mandatory HIV testing is extremely controversial, and it continues to be a topic of debate. I sought some views from a number of people and this is what they had to say.....

Eunice Banda  
Hairdresser

No. I believe that the impact of HIV positive diagnosis on an individual's life is enormous and forcing people to be tested against their will is a huge mistake. The combination of stigma, discrimination and denial associated with Aids can yield fatalistic results if people are tested by force, against their freewill.

Chipirilo Limange  
Secondary school student

Mandatory HIV testing will prove to be counter-productive because it violates privacy of the concerned person and also stigmatizes the entire family. Furthermore there is no evidence which shows that mandatory testing will result in behavioral changes. I also believe that mandatory testing will drive the target people underground and complicate issues of medical intervention

Raphael Kamfansiyanji  
Secondary school teacher

One of the strongest grounds is that mandatory HIV testing infringes upon the human rights of people living with HIV and threatens the three key principles of HIV testing namely consent, voluntary counselling and confidentiality put a lot of people at risk because they would then loosen up.

George Mtunduwatha  
Clinical Officer

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Alan Kanyinji  
College Student

I do not think force is the best way out. I think that we could go a long way if people were educated and sensitised about the danger they may subject themselves to if they got married before knowing each other's HIV status.

Mayamiko Phiri  
Bus Driver

HIV testing should not be mandatory because it would be infringing on the fundamental human rights of the people. What we should be doing is to make people aware of the dangers involve so they can make a choice. The government is stigmatizing people living with HIV/ AIDS, which is not right.

Owen Jere  
College Student

I think it should be made mandatory. That will be a step in the right direction. It will also curb the menace to an extent. This is due to the fact that, some men and women who even know they are positive hide it from their would-be spouses, by the time they discover it's too late.

Thokozani Chitseko  
Businessman

I think the government is right. It will help people make informed choices. Some people are not honest enough to disclose their HIV status. Since most people, at least in Malawi marry to make children, they will surely have intercourse without condoms.