

# HIV and AIDS Myth Buster



“Engaging Young People to Prevent the Spread of HIV” is a pilot project implemented by the NGO SPACE (Society for People’s Awareness, Care and Empowerment) and supported by UNESCO, New Delhi. This project is currently operational in 10 colleges of Delhi University and aims to enhance knowledge and skills of young people so that they are empowered to respond effectively to the challenges posed by HIV and AIDS.

This booklet is based on common myths and misconceptions prevalent among college youth about HIV and AIDS and sex and sexuality. These myths came to light during focus group discussions conducted in colleges with peer leaders/educators as part of the baseline understanding.

The booklet aims to address the questions, misconceptions and myths prevalent among educated youth about HIV and AIDS and related issues. It is designed in a simple way to give young people practical answers to their questions. We hope it will be a step in the journey towards empowering young people as agents of change.

# Red Ribbon

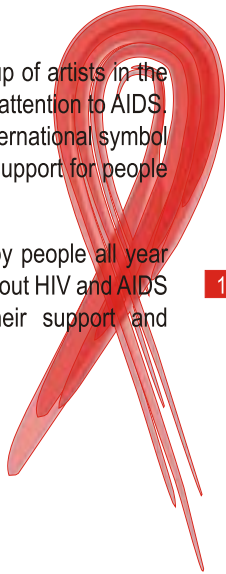
## Myth

**"Red Ribbon is an AIDS symbol".  
"Red Ribbon is a sign of danger".**

## Fact

Red Ribbon was conceived in 1991 by a group of artists in the United States of America who wanted to draw attention to AIDS. Since then the Red Ribbon has become an international symbol of AIDS awareness and visual expression of support for people affected by AIDS.

The Red Ribbon is increasingly being worn by people all year around to demonstrate their concern & care about HIV and AIDS and to remind others for the need of their support and commitment.



# Red Ribbon

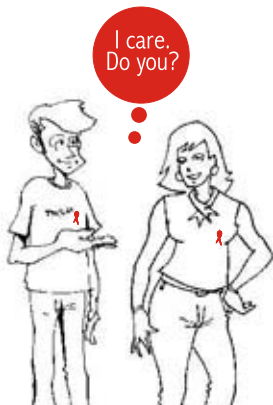
## Myth

**"People who wear the Red Ribbon are infected with the AIDS virus".**

## Fact

People who wear Red Ribbon show their concern and support for people living with HIV & AIDS. By wearing the Red Ribbon, they are simply demonstrating their commitment to spread awareness and help fight the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV & AIDS.

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# HIV and AIDS

## Myth

**"Youth don't need HIV and AIDS awareness".**

## Fact

Young people are especially vulnerable to HIV infection because of a variety of factors such as curiosity, experimentation and most importantly peer pressure. Various studies show that there are gaps in their knowledge and they have insufficient information about HIV and AIDS. Youth can be advocates for change once they are empowered with the right knowledge and skills.



# HIV and AIDS

## Myth

"AIDS is mainly a problem of uneducated people especially living in the urban slums".

## Fact

AIDS is everybody's problem. It cuts across community, caste, class, religion, gender, education and occupation. HIV does not discriminate between educated and uneducated people. It is not who you are but what you do that matters.



# HIV and AIDS

## Myth

"HIV and AIDS are one and the same thing".

## Fact

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. This virus can be transmitted from person to person. It decreases body's ability to fight off various infections. This leads to AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. HIV is the cause and AIDS is the effect.

**HIV ≠ AIDS**

# HIV and AIDS

## Myth

**"It takes years for the symptoms of AIDS to develop, so there is no point in telling others about the infection".**

## Fact

It is true that it takes many years (eight to ten years on average without treatment) after initial infection with HIV for the symptoms of AIDS to develop. It is very important to talk about it with your partner. It is the responsibility of a HIV positive person to avoid infecting others. Therefore, if you are in a sexual relationship with your partner, s/he also needs to get tested.





# HIV and AIDS

## Myth

"I can tell by looking at a person if s/he has HIV".

## Fact

You cannot tell whether a person has HIV or not by looking at his/her appearance. There are often no specific signs and symptoms of HIV infection for a long time. An infected person may look healthy and only a blood test for HIV can show whether a person is infected or not.

Oh! he seems to be having HIV.



# HIV and AIDS

## Myth

"AIDS is a glamour business. So many celebrities are associated with it. These people should be working on other equally fatal diseases"?

## Fact

AIDS is not a glamour business. Some celebrities have associated themselves with the cause because of the seriousness of the problem. HIV and AIDS is associated with unprecedented stigma and discrimination that is why celebrities need to be associated with the cause.



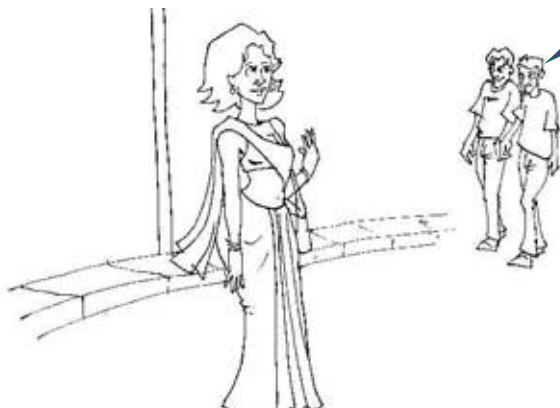
# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"Only female sex workers spread HIV infection".

## Fact

Not only sex workers, but anyone, male or female, can spread HIV. HIV mainly spreads through unprotected sex with an infected partner. The chances of acquiring HIV are higher when there are multiple sexual partners.



Don't forget to use a condom.

# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"Sex with known person such as a friend or neighbor is safe".

## Fact

Unprotected sex with anyone is not safe. No one can be guaranteed to be free of HIV, even if they are your neighbour or friend.

What about tonight!



# HIV Transmission

## Myth

**"Only people with multiple sexual partners contract HIV".**

## Fact

People with multiple sexual partners are at a higher risk of getting HIV infection. Even a single act of unprotected sex with an infected partner may lead to HIV infection.



# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"Oral sex is safe, because there is no penetration".

## Fact

Oral sex is not completely safe. There is a low risk associated with it as compared to unprotected vaginal or oral sex. Unprotected oral sex can lead to HIV infection if either of the partners is infected with HIV and has sores or cuts in the mouth. Only the proper use of a condom makes it safe.

**STRAWBERRY  
CHOCOLATE  
BANANA  
FLAVOR**

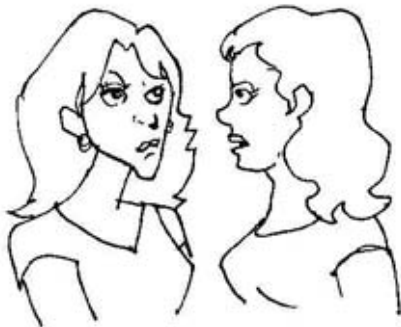
# HIV Transmission

## Myth

**"It is safe to have sex during menstruation. There can be no pregnancy and no infection of HIV".**

## Fact

It is possible, although not common, for a woman to become pregnant during menstruation. But there is definitely a possibility of getting/ transmitting HIV during menstruation.



# HIV Transmission

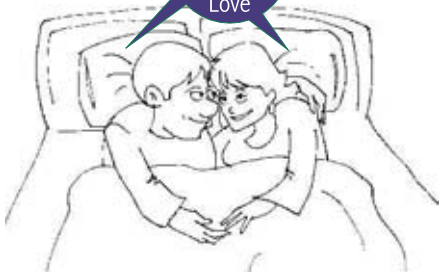
## Myth

**"It's safe for a HIV positive person to have unprotected sex with other HIV positive persons".**

## Fact

HIV is of more than one type - HIV 1 and HIV 2 and has different strains. One cannot assume that both the partners have exactly the same type of HIV. It is possible to get infected with another type/strain of HIV. Therefore it is important for each of the partner to avoid unprotected sex and use condoms consistently.

HIV is not  
a barrier  
to our  
Love





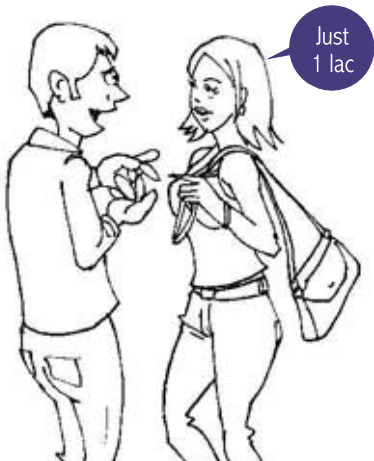
# HIV Transmission

## Myth

**"There's no risk of getting HIV and other STIs with women who charge a hefty amount for sex".**

## Fact

HIV does not differentiate between rich and poor. It is the behavior that puts you at risk.



# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"Blood donation can lead to HIV infection".

## Fact

Blood donation cannot lead to HIV infection, because the blood collection equipments are sterilized and not reusable. Therefore one cannot get HIV by donating blood. Young people should donate blood on a regular basis.



# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"The "Window Period" is the time when one has not tested positive for HIV, so it cannot be transmitted to anyone else".

## Fact

When the body is infected with HIV, it produces antibodies specific to HIV. The HIV test (ELISA) detects such antibodies in the blood and does not detect the virus itself. It takes about **3-12 weeks** from the date of exposure to HIV antibodies to appear in the blood. This period is called the Window Period. If the HIV antibody test is taken during the **Window Period**, it will give negative result, since the blood test is looking for antibodies that have not yet developed. But the person may already be HIV infected and capable of transmitting the infection to others.



# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"Cleaning a needle with hot water makes it safe for reuse and share".

## Fact

Just cleaning a needle with hot water cannot prevent HIV. The needle and syringe have to be boiled for at least 20 minutes to sterilize them completely before using. Sharing needles and syringes should always be avoided and as far as possible disposable syringes with needles should be used, which should be discarded after single use.



# HIV Transmission

## Myth

**"Living with a HIV positive person could be risky as one cannot always cover one's hand and other exposed body parts".**

## Fact

HIV cannot be spread by touching, eating together, sharing clothes, hugging, looking after and caring for HIV positive people. Simply living together with a HIV positive person cannot be risky.



# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"It is possible to get HIV from toilet seat".

## Fact

HIV cannot be spread from toilet seats. HIV spread only through unprotected sex, infected needles/piercing instruments, transfusion of infected blood or from infected mother to child.

I hope  
no one with  
HIV  
sat on it



# HIV Transmission

## Myth

**"Sharing of shaving blades in saloons can cause HIV infection".**

## Fact

During a shave there are chances of micro injuries and small quantity of blood may stick on the blade/razor. However, HIV is a very fragile virus. It cannot survive once exposed to sunlight.

Shared blades/razors do increase the risk of contracting Hepatitis B and other contagious skin diseases. Hence it is advisable to use a separate blade for each shave.



# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"HIV can be transmitted by sharing cigarettes with a HIV positive person".

## Fact

Saliva cannot transmit HIV, hence sharing a cigarette with a HIV positive person cannot transmit the virus.





# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"Saliva can spread HIV infection".

## Fact

Only four body fluids namely; blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk are known to spread HIV if they are infected. Saliva cannot spread HIV.



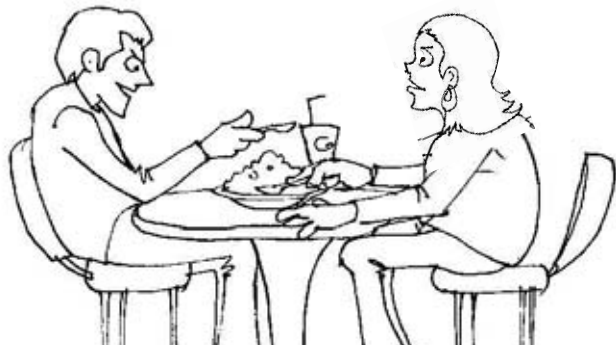
# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"Sharing food can cause HIV infection".

## Fact

The mode of transmission of HIV is not the same as other infections like diarrhoea or TB. Therefore HIV infection cannot be transmitted by sharing food.



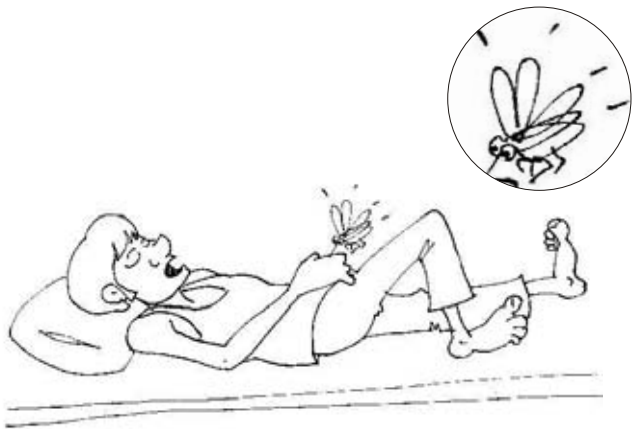
# HIV Transmission

## Myth

"A mosquito bite can cause HIV infection if the mosquito has bitten an HIV positive person".

## Fact

Mosquitoes only suck blood and do not inject blood. Mosquitoes cannot transmit HIV.



# HIV Testing and Human rights

## Myth

**"The result of HIV test should not be kept confidential so that other people can help the infected ones".**

## Fact

The shame, stigma and discrimination associated with HIV and AIDS make it important to keep the HIV test reports confidential. Many people living with HIV have faced discrimination once they have disclosed their HIV status. Only the concerned person who has undergone the test has the right to inform or confide about his/her HIV status to any one.

Should I or should'nt I?



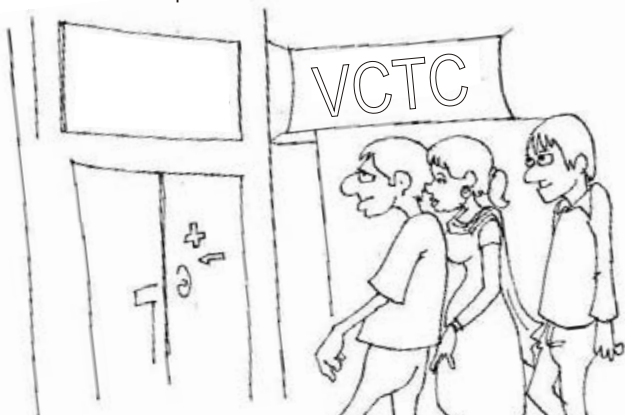
# HIV Testing and Human rights

## Myth

**"There should be mandatory testing of HIV of all sex workers so that the spread of HIV infection can be controlled".**

## Fact

HIV is not spread only by sex workers. HIV tests can be done only after receiving informed consent of the person to be tested. Mandatory testing is violation of a person's basic rights and may lead to non-cooperation.



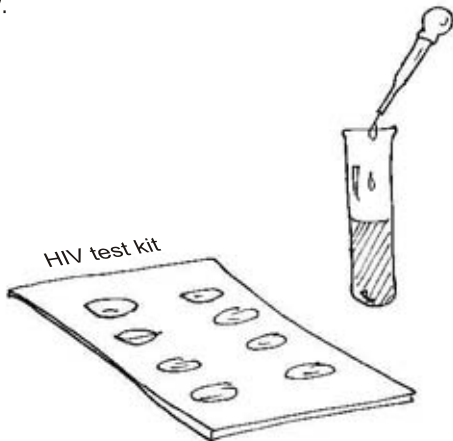
# HIV Testing and Human rights

## Myth

**"Any blood test can detect HIV".**

## Fact

No. Only specific blood tests can detect the presence of HIV antibody.



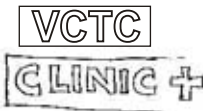
# HIV Testing and Human rights

## Myth

**"The best way to know one's HIV status is by donating blood".**

## Fact

Donating blood is not an appropriate way to learn about one's HIV status. A HIV test should always be preceded by pre test counseling where the advantages and disadvantages of getting a test done are discussed with the person. There fore, one should go to a Voluntary Counseling & Testing Centre (VCTC) to get oneself tested for HIV and not to a blood bank.



# HIV Testing and Human rights

## Myth

**HIV test is a costly affair. Only few private hospitals have this facility.**

## Fact

HIV testing facility is available in almost all the Medical Government Hospital and all Voluntary Counseling & Testing Centres (VCTC) in India. It is free of cost in these hospitals and Centres. Some may charge a small fee of Rs. 10/-.

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I can't afford the HIV test.



It is free at VCTC



# HIV Treatment

## Myth

"HIV can be cured, but not AIDS".

## Fact

HIV can be treated with Antiretroviral Drugs (ARV) but cannot be cured.



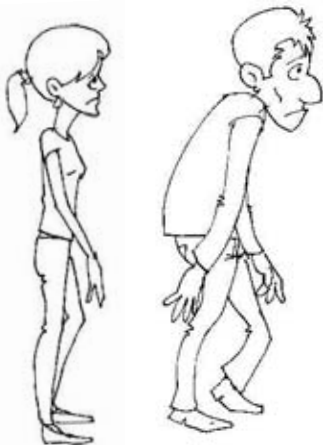
# Sexually Transmitted Infections

## Myth

"STIs make a person weak".

## Fact

Weakness can result from a variety of reasons and having untreated STIs can be one of them.



# Sexually Transmitted Infections

## Myth

**"In case of STIs one should consult a sexologist".**

## Fact

In case of STIs, one should consult a qualified medical practitioner i.e. s/he should be at least a qualified MBBS doctor. A number of self proclaimed sexologists promise treatment for STIs. They may not treat the STI completely which can cause complications later.



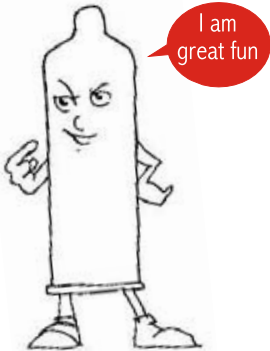
# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

"Condom reduces sexual pleasure".

## Fact

It is a matter of personal choice. There are people who get more pleasure out of it. Unlike in olden times, condoms are now so thin and elastic that hardly any sensation is lost. Freedom from unwanted pregnancy, prevention from infections like HIV and other STIs enhances the feeling of pleasure rather than reduce it.



# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"Excessive masturbation leads to impotency".**

## Fact

Masturbation does not lead to impotency. It is perfectly normal for people, including young people to masturbate. There is no scientific evidence that masturbation causes impotency or sexual weakness. There is no such thing as "excessive" masturbation. Sexual needs and desires vary from person to person.



# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"Real man should not pay heed to women when they refuse sex. It's women's nature to say no even if they want it".**

## Fact

Sex should be a pleasurable and consensual act between two people. A woman should never be forced to have sexual intercourse. A "Real man" is mature and sensitive to understand other's feelings. He is a responsible person who respects the decision of women. He does not in any circumstances sexually force himself upon others.



# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

"Men need to experience sex before getting married".

## Fact

It is untrue that men need to experience sex before marriage. Sex is a mutual experience and it is great if a man can share this beautiful experience with his committed partner and not with someone else.



# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"Contraceptive pills can protect from STIs including HIV".**

## Fact

No contraceptive pills can protect against HIV, as they are meant only to prevent unwanted pregnancies and not HIV or other STIs. Only a condom (which is also a contraceptive) can prevent STIs including HIV.





# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"Sex with virgin girls and minors can protect/cure a person from STI infections including HIV".**

## Fact

Sex with minors or virgin girls cannot cure or protect a man from Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) including HIV. It is a crime to engage in sex with a minor.



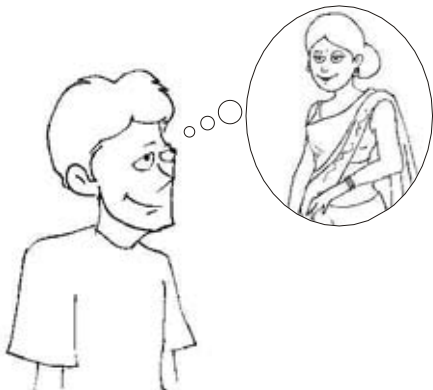
# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

"Sex with a healthy married woman is safe".

## Fact

Unprotected sex with a HIV infected person carries the risk of HIV infection. Even a married woman could be infected with HIV in spite of looking healthy. HIV can be transmitted between any two people through unprotected sex if either of them is infected.



# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"It's not good for women to ask for condoms. It shows she is unfaithful and also doesn't trust her partner".**

## Fact

When a woman asks for condoms it shows her maturity and concern for herself and her partner. She has a right to make decision and negotiate safe sex to protect herself.



# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"Girls who do not bleed in their first sexual intercourse are not virgin".**

## Fact

Bleeding during first sexual intercourse may occur in some girls because of tearing of the tissue of the hymen. The presence of a hymen is believed to be linked to one's virginity. This is however not true as the hymen can break not only through sexual intercourse, but also by participation in certain other kinds of physical activities and sports. In certain cases it may not be there at all.



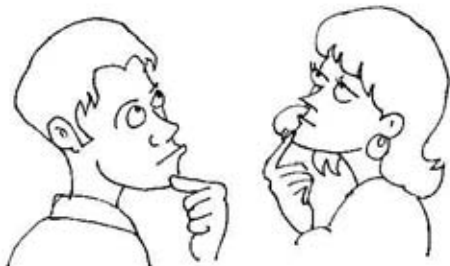
# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"I don't sleep around, so I don't need to practice safe sex"?**

## Fact

Unprotected sex with even a single partner or sex only once in a life time can be risky if the partner is infected with HIV.



# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"Homosexual men/gays are more prone to HIV infection".**

## Fact

By just being gay/homosexual will not cause HIV infection. Only when there is unprotected sex with an infected partner is there the chance of getting HIV.



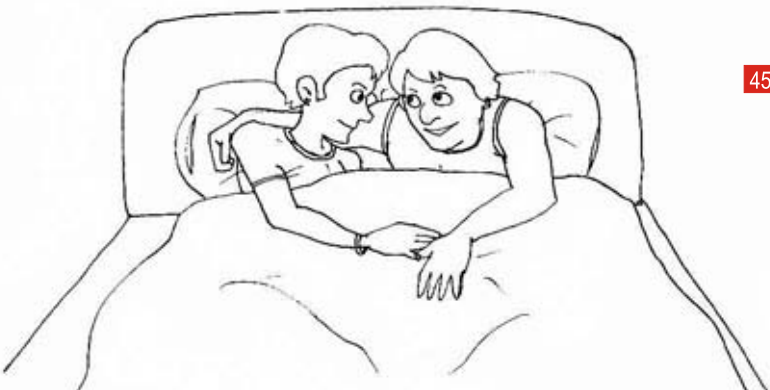
# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"Man to man sex is safe. There is no risk of HIV as there is no vaginal penetration".**

## Fact

Unprotected anal sex between men carries higher risk of HIV infection than vaginal sex. The tissues of the anal region are tighter and there are more chances of tears and cuts when penetrated and thus HIV can get very easy entry points.



# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

"Effeminate men are gays".

## Fact

It is the sexual orientation of a person that makes him a 'gay' or 'straight' and not the outward appearance or behavior.





# Sex and Sexuality

## Myth

**"Homosexuality is a psychological problem. It can be treated with counseling".**

## Fact

There is nothing wrong with being a homosexual. It is a sexual attraction towards the same sex. It is not a mental disorder that needs psychological counseling. One does what comes naturally: homosexuality is simply a way of being, as is heterosexuality. One does not need any treatment or counseling to get rid of a homosexual orientation.



# Other Myths

## Myth

"NACO is the name of the HIV testing centre in Delhi".

## Fact

NACO stands for National AIDS Control Organization. The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare constituted a National AIDS Committee in 1986, under the chairmanship of the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare and a National AIDS Control Programme was launched in the year 1987 to formulate strategy and plan for implementation of prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in the country.



# Other Myths

## Myth

"VCTC is the name of a HIV test".

## Fact

VCTC stands for Voluntary Counseling & Testing Centres. These centres are set up by the Government of India for HIV testing and counseling.





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Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

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