

## Counselling and Testing

95% of people living with HIV do not know they are infected.

The potential benefits when expanding counselling and testing are enormous. It is estimated that by 2005 there will be up to 180 million people in need of counselling and testing, annually.

Voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) is more than just providing HIV test results. It includes pre- and post-test counselling.

VCT services should be widely promoted as they have been demonstrated to be an effective public health strategy to prevent HIV transmission by reducing risk behaviours and increasing condom use.

### Voluntary counselling and testing

- ▶ *Benefits individuals.* Knowing their HIV status enables those tested HIV-positive to gain early access to HIV/AIDS care, treatment and support; enables pregnant women to access interventions to prevent transmission of the virus to their infants; and those tested HIV-negative to remain negative by adopting safe behaviours.
- ▶ *Benefits communities* by reducing the denial, stigma and discrimination that surround HIV/AIDS.
- ▶ *Benefits programmes.* VCTs interface between prevention, care and treatment, and should be offered widely in health-care settings to anyone who might benefit from knowing their HIV status; VCTs serve as entry points to HIV/AIDS care and support.



- ▶ HIV testing must be voluntary
- ▶ Confidentially must be protected
- ▶ Referral to post-test care, treatment and support services should be offered
- ▶ Counselling and testing services of quality must be scaled-up

**Quality of VCT is key to success!**