

Cabinet gives thumbs-up to new Aids plan

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The Cabinet has approved an implementation plan to scale up the HIV/Aids prevention and treatment programme recently presented by Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi.

The new plan aims to reduce the rate of infection by 50% by 2011 and provide antiretroviral (ARV) treatment to 80% of those who need the treatment, government spokesperson Themba Maseko told a media briefing on Thursday following Cabinet's regular meeting on Wednesday.

"More emphasis will be placed on prevention through information, education, widespread distribution of condoms and mobilisation of millions of South Africans to know their status," he said.

Highlights of the new plan include voluntary and public HIV/Aids testing led by Cabinet members and other leaders from broader society; a move from voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) to HIV counselling and testing (HCT); and a service-delivery model that offers testing to all patients at the entry points in all health institutions.

The target of the HCT campaign is to test up to 15-million people by June 2011, Maseko said.

Healthy lifestyles

The campaign will also promote healthy lifestyles and increase access to treatment, care and support. All public health facilities, fixed and mobile, will be equipped to offer HIV testing and to provide ARVs.

Retired and non-practising medical staff, such as doctors, nurses and pharmacists, will be asked to make themselves available to the health system to support this initiative. Motsoaledi has already written letters to all retired and non-practising practitioners, appealing to them to support the campaign.

Cabinet also appealed to these professionals to respond positively to Motsoaledi's call "in the country's hour of need".

The new HIV/Aids implementation plan will be launched in Gauteng on April 15, with provincial launches in all provinces on April 19.