

Rhodes University: Policy on HIV/AIDS

The University recognises the extreme seriousness of HIV infection and AIDS, and in view of the implications of the disease both at the workplace and wider society it is committed to formulating a policy to deal with problem.

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is a disease caused by infection with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). The HIV is spread only when contaminated body fluid (effectively blood, semen or vaginal fluid) enters the bloodstream of a non-infected person.

The dominant modes of transmission of the HIV are:

unprotected penetrative sexual intercourse (oral, vaginal, anal) where the exchange of bodily fluids takes place,
through the accidental or deliberate shared use of HIV contaminated needles or skin cutting instruments (in and out of health care settings),
from infected mothers to infants,
through transfusion of infected blood or blood products.
Since the HIV cannot be contracted through most usual work-place or study contact the University will view a person infected with HIV as it does any well person and it will view a person with AIDS as it does a person with any other chronic illness or disability.

Given the nature of the disease and the devastating effect it is already having in our society, the University affirms the need to make its position clear on the following key questions related to HIV infection and AIDS, in the interests of those infected as well as of those who are not currently infected.

1. Confidentiality

Within the limits of the law the University will respect the right of staff and students to confidentiality of their HIV status.

2. Screening

Potential staff and students will not be refused employment or entry to the University on the grounds that they test positive for HIV. The University will not therefore, introduce compulsory screening procedures to test for HIV (either prior to employment/admission or during employment/study).

3. Testing

The University endorses informed consent for individual testing, accompanied by confidential and appropriate counselling, and encourages both employees and students to be aware of their HIV status so that they can make appropriate health decisions for themselves.

4. Employment Contracts

4.1 No employment contract will be terminated on account of HIV positivity or AIDS alone.

4.2 Affected staff are encouraged to advise the University where there are job performance implications.

4.3 Provided the staff member is able to work effectively, the University will make every reasonable effort to accommodate the member of staff but, if the person is no longer able to work, and/or no suitable position can be found after the University has attempted to identify such a position, the appropriate retirement policies or other Labour Relations rules will apply.

5. Education

Issues of discrimination and victimisation still surround HIV infection and AIDS. These arise from misconceptions regarding the origins of the virus, misinformation about promiscuity and sexuality, and inaccuracy concerning the infectiousness of people who carry the virus.

Most people are potentially susceptible to HIV infection. With no cure in sight, prevention through education is the only means available to us. The University therefore commits itself to running education programmes which will address these issues.

5.1 Individual Awareness

The University will inform staff and students about the nature and transmission of the virus, and precautions that can be taken to reduce the risk of infection.

5.2 Social Awareness

The University is opposed to any form of discrimination against HIV positive people or AIDS sufferers and their partners, family and friends on the basis of their HIV infection or AIDS. The University therefore commits itself to programmes which address these issues and which foster a compassion for the sufferers.

5.3 Awareness of the Policy

The University will ensure that all staff members and students are aware of this policy and its implications as it affects them, and the people for whom they are responsible as managers, lecturers, wardens, sub-wardens or administrative staff.

6. Emergency or First-Aid Situations

The University believes that universal precautions should be adopted by all individuals likely to be involved in administering first aid. The University undertakes to educate all first aid officials in universal precaution techniques and to require that all first-aid kits (including those of sports clubs and appropriate departments/divisions) be equipped with the necessary equipment. These first-aid kits will be inspected regularly by the responsible person (the appropriate Safety Representative, Sports Officer, Hall Warden, Sanatorium Sister, etc).

7. High Risk Areas

Whenever members of staff or students are likely to experience a risk of exposure to HIV infection in the course of their duties or studies, the University undertakes to set in place additional procedures for prevention of infection.

8. Staff and Student Interactions

8.1 Because of the modes of transmission of infection, the HIV status of an individual should not become a reason for staff or students refusing to work with, study with or be taught by such an individual. Consequently such refusal will, in general, not be considered a valid reason for non-compliance with

academic work or other University requirements.

Students and staff will not be barred from attending lectures, living in residences, being on campus or being involved in campus activities on account of their HIV positivity or AIDS alone.

8.2 In the case of sports that may carry a higher than normal risk of HIV infection, it is the responsibility of that club to adhere to its own code of practice or to put into place appropriate procedures for the minimization of risk, consistent with this policy.

9. Benefits

The University, through the Human Resources Division, undertakes to ensure that all current health disability and pension benefits and life assurance plans are appropriate to deal with HIV and AIDS and to ensure that members of staff receive suitable benefits, protection and support.

10. Treatment

Students or staff who have been exposed to infection in the course of their official duties or their studies will receive appropriate assistance from the University. This may include anti- retroviral medication, under medical advice, in an emergency situation. Appropriate charges may be levied.

11. HIV/AIDS Task Group

11.1 Composition

The Implementation of the University's HIV/AIDS policy will be the responsibility of the HIV/AIDS Committee which will be constituted as follows:

Head: Counselling & Career Centre (convenor)

One representative from the Human Resources Division

One member of the SRC

One Warden nominated by the Board of Residences

One student nominated by the Board of Residences

One representative from each of NEHAWU and NTESU

One student from the Oppidan Union

One representative from the East London campus

11.2 Powers to co-opt

This committee will have powers to co-opt as required. Areas of the University from which such co-opted members should be considered include: the Dean of Students, the Library, the Sanatorium, Sports Administration, Marketing and Communications, Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation (CARDE), the Estates Division and higher risk academic areas such as certain departments in the Faculties of Science and Pharmacy.

11.3 Meetings

This committee will meet at least once each term.

11.4 Reporting

This Committee will report through the Student Services Council to Senate and to the Director of the Human Resources Division concerning its activities.

11.5 Objectives

The objectives of this Committee will be to engage in activities on the Grahamstown campus as well as on the East London campus, and take steps to provide education, counselling and support for students and staff of the University concerning HIV/AIDS and related issues in order to:

- (a) Raise the awareness of HIV/AIDS as potentially problematic to the Rhodes community as individuals as well as corporately.
- (b) Encourage appropriate responses and support towards those who are HIV positive, and to others who suffer as a result.
- (c) Encourage appropriate behaviour to limit the chances of becoming infected.

11.6 Activities

To achieve these objectives the Committee, in close co-operation with other campus services and divisions such as the SRC, University Library, academic departments, Human Resources, staff associations, counselling and health

services and with appropriate community resources may:

- (a) undertake research into knowledge and attitudes about HIV/AIDS amongst staff and students, their sexual practices and other related issues;
- (b) maintain a data base of all HIV/AIDS related research and other activities being undertaken by departments and divisions of the University;
- (c) arrange education programmes to raise the awareness amongst staff and students about HIV/AIDS related issues and to foster a supportive and caring attitude towards those who are infected;
- (d) co-ordinate "support services" for students and staff who have HIV/AIDS related concerns;
- (e) make representations to the University for the inclusion of HIV/AIDS related issues in relevant subject curricula;
- (f) make representations to the University concerning HIV/AIDS related benefits and medical care;
- (g) act in an advisory capacity to the University and communicate relevant concerns to the wider community.

12. Review

The HIV/AIDS Committee will review this policy from time to time.