RUMBI AND SUNGI TALK ABOUT HIV TESTING AND COVID-19
Hey Rumbi, come and help me with something.

What's up! How are you?

I am good, listen you know about HIV testing right?

Sure I do, what about it?
So I was just thinking that with this COVID–19 still being a pain, can you even get an HIV test anymore? All the talk around testing these days seems to be about COVID–19.

Yes! You can get an HIV test. We all know, COVID–19 has changed so many things and lots of services don’t work in the same way as they used to. But you can still go for a test.

But isn’t it really complicated, like you have to book and go to a different place? It all sounds like a hassle to me.
Sungi, if someone needs to have an HIV test then they should go. It is still the only way to know if you are HIV positive and COVID hasn’t changed that.

The HIV test is still simple and it is the only way to get started on treatment and care which can help someone live a healthy life.

Yea sure but isn’t it better to wait until lockdown restrictions have been removed?
The most common test is an HIV antibody test. When you become infected with HIV, the body makes antibodies to fight HIV. Antibodies attach to the virus to try and destroy it.

If these antibodies are found, it means that your body is reacting to an HIV infection. It means you are ‘HIV positive’. It can take up to three months for these antibodies to show up in the test, so if you think you may have been infected recently, it is important to test again after 3 months to be sure.

If you have HIV and don’t know your status, HIV will be damaging your immune system and could make you very sick. You may only get to find out you have HIV when you are really unwell. Trust me you don’t want to wait that long!

Alright so how does the test work?
The first test involves taking a prick of blood from your finger. It sounds painful but really it isn’t that bad.

There are different ways to get tested.

Wow Rumbi, look at you talking all these big words, you know a lot! So what if you have never been tested before, how do you even ask for the HIV test?

This is usually done by a health care worker in a clinic or can be done by community testers near where you live.
The second test is an HIV self-test.

This is also a rapid test but you do the test in your own time and in a place where you feel comfortable.

You collect your own sample and test it in a special kit which gives you a result.

HIV self-test kits are distributed by community health workers or you can get one at your nearest facility or pharmacy.
The self-test sounds good, you don’t even have to tell anyone.

Yes, you can do it privately on your own but it is good to get counselling before you use the self-test and it is really important to remember the self-test kit can’t tell you for sure if you are HIV positive, it is a screening test to help you know whether you need to go and have a diagnostic test done by a health worker.

If you get a ‘reactive result’ which says you are HIV positive you must go to the clinic for another test to find out for sure.

If the health worker confirms you are HIV positive, you will then be able to start ART.

So for that, I just go on my own to the clinic right?

Well, there are sometimes age limits on testing. You will need to check whether you need to go with a caregiver or guardian. Children and adolescents who don’t have a caregiver can ask their health worker to help them get a test.
Call your clinic and find out when you can come for testing or ask a health worker about organisations providing HIV testing services in your community.

You could think about using HIV self-testing and get a free self-test kit from a community distributor or health facility near you or buy an approved kit from your nearest pharmacy. But remember with that one you still need to go to the clinic for a follow up test.

Thanks, Rumbi! I knew you would help!

No problem, my guy—taking an HIV test and knowing your status is winning half the battle—take ownership of your health!