

J A S L DECODED

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- JASL's 30th Anniversary Mural
- What's PrEPping?
- Safer Sex Week Highlights
- PLHIV presents to Police Officers
- Viral Suppression is a journey

NEWSLETTER
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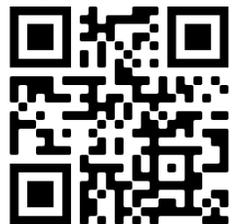
STILL PUSHING SAFER SEX!



Jamaica AIDS Support For Life
Love. Action. Support.

Jamaica AIDS Support For Life is the largest and longest-serving HIV-focused NGO in Jamaica. The contents of the newsletter are the responsibility of JASL and do not necessarily reflect the views of donor agencies supporting the organisation.

SCAN ME



What's PrEPping?

Since the rollout of Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) programme in 2020, the Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) has enrolled over **138** persons to use the drug. The programme has been proven to be a success and is geared towards safeguarding the lives of persons who are

at high risk of contracting HIV. So far men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender women as well as people in serodiscordant couples make up the beneficiaries. PrEP is now being offered at JASL's three locations.

Here are two of our clients testimonials:



PrEPSTERS TESTIMONIALS

My PrEP Journey

“I have always heard my friends overseas talking about being on PrEP and never really understood how a single pill could be so effective against HIV contraction. This has always drawn my curiosity and when Jamaica through the MOHW via JASL introduced the pilot PrEP program I quickly jumped on it. This was after I had received the necessary information from the health professionals at JASL and having done my own research

about the side effects of taking the pill.

After being examined by Dr. Powe, and having done some blood works I was given the green light to start taking the PrEP medication.

At first, I experienced rashes and lethargy but these dissipated with time. The monthly check ups and blood works were formalities, ensuring that my body was reacting properly to the drug.

It has been almost 2 years since I have started taking PrEP which

not only acts as an extra protective layer against contracting HIV but it provides an ease of mind.

The after care program provided by JASL for PrEP users, is active and commendable, as I am always called and reminded about my appointment to do my regular check ups and blood works every 3 or so months.

PrEP – a single pill a day that prevents me from getting HIV.

– FW



To culminate its 30th anniversary, Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) unveiled a mural titled 'LOVE.ACTION.SUPPORT' at the corner of Water Lane and Duke Street in Downtown, Kingston. The mural is a symbol of the organization's commitment to break stigma and discrimination against HIV & AIDS. It's designed using the red ribbon as the symbol of solidarity and awareness for people living with HIV/AIDS. It is masterfully woven to

showcase a celebration of life for individuals in various settings, despite sexual orientation, age, gender, race, or socioeconomic background.

JASL's team members from left are: Effin Ashbourne (Security Officer), Ianthie Pyrce (Programmes Administrative Assistant), Kandasi Walton-Levermore (Executive Director), Marilyn Thompson (Social Worker) and Mario McKoy (ICT Peer Navigator).



My Partner is HIV Positive: But I am on PrEP!

“I am currently in a serodiscordant relationship, which means my partner is HIV-positive and I am HIV-negative. To reduce the risk of HIV transmission, it was important for me to get on PrEP as a preventive measure. PrEP in conjunction with condom use and my partner’s strict adherence to his antiretroviral therapy are the best ways of maintaining our health. My first PrEP clinic was a “breeze” being knowledgeable about the product facilitated ease of discussion with the healthcare providers who work at the facility. I find them relatable and interested in my general wellbeing. A job well done to the individuals who coordinate this clinic. Dr Bellanfate and nurse Desmond are truly professional and customer centric in their operation of the clinic. I have been taking PrEP for four (4) months and have not experienced any side effects. My bloodwork has been normal, and most importantly I have remained HIV negative. I am happy that science has come a long

way to protect persons like me from HIV infection. I would recommend PrEP from JASL to persons as a means of HIV prevention. Access to the medication is convenient, fees are nominal, and the service is personalized. I appreciate the ease of pick-up of my medication, no long lines nor extended wait. This convenience facilitates my busy schedule. The quality of PrEP supplied by JASL compares well with other registered brands and is equally efficacious. Special mention to Naomi and team who coordinate my pick-up of PrEP. The environment is very relaxed and the team is very professional. My PrEP experience has been very good and now readily recommend to my friends to get “PrEP” to prevent HIV transmission.

– JT



One-a-day PrEP prevents an HIV negative person from contracting the virus

SEND US A DIRECT MESSAGE FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO START TODAY!

#BePrEPARED

TIPS ON HOW TO GET VIRALLY SUPPRESSED



Step 1- Taking Your Meds on Time, Everytime!

- Use an alarm clock/phone as a reminder to take meds every day and on time.
- If you have difficulties swallowing pills, talk to your healthcare provider to find the best options that works for you.
- Ensure you stick to the regimen prescribed by YOUR doctor.
- Ask your family members, friends, or co-workers to remind you to take your medicines.
- Ensure that you have an adequate amount of pill at all time in a convenient location.



Step 2- Manage your side effects

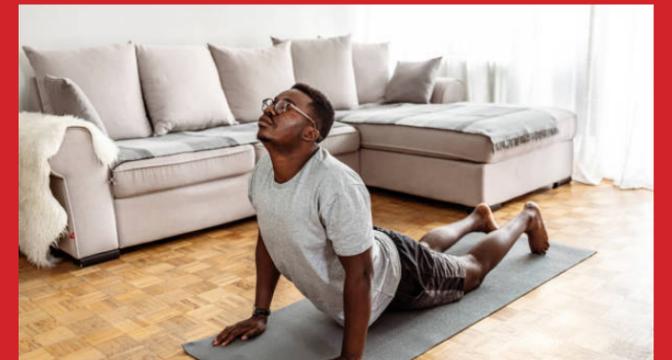
- Side effects may come with taking ARVs. If you are experiencing any prolonged side effects from

taking your ARVS talk to your healthcare provider.



Step 3- Healthy Lifestyle

- Practice safer sex to avoid HIV reinfection.
- Limit alcohol/drugs use.



Step 4- Manage your Mental & Social Health

- See a therapist to work through issues around disclosure and gender based violence.
- Join an adherence support group to learn from fellow peers on how to improve adherence. Its always good to hear from others who have been living with HIV and what they did to reach viral suppression.
- Participate in healthy activities that makes you happy (meditation, yoga etcv).

'DUH YUH PART! SAFER SEX IS A START.'



Since 1994, Safer Sex Week has been observed annually to increase awareness for safer sex practices. This initiative is one that Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) fully supports because of what it seeks to achieve. This year Safer Sex Week was observed from February 13 – February 18 under the theme *'Duh yuh part! Safer sex is a start.'*



The Montego Bay team were out for #SaferSexWeek in the Mobay Bus Park where they offered Free HIV/ Syphilis tests, condom demonstrations and giveaways.



The St Ann team visited the community of Manchioneal, Portland where they offered free HIV and Syphilis tests and encouraged the residents to get vaccinated.



Members of JASL's Kingston team led sessions with Upper School Students at Kingston Technical High School, sharing information about safer sex and condom usage.



The Kingston team was at Portmore Pines Plaza for a live outside broadcast with Suncity Radio 104.9fm in observation of #SaferSexWeek.

JASL takes it to the LAW

As part of JASL work to ensure that the Human Rights of people living with HIV (PLHIV), other key populations and the most vulnerable among us is respected; the EEHR unit kicked off its 2022 duty bearer's sensitization, with two-day HIV & Human Rights Training sessions with Police Officers from the St. Mary Division and Manchester Divisions.

The session was focussed on Stigma and Discrimination, HIV Basic Facts, GBV & HIV, Laws and Policies that guide Police Citizen Interaction and Human Rights. This session was delivered to in-service police officers as in an effort to create an enabling environment for vulnerable groups. JASL focuses significantly on officers already in the field. The objectives of the session were to provide:

- A basic understanding of human rights and examine how they can be incorporated into the service delivery of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF).
 - An understanding of how police officers can best interface with members of key populations with a view to enabling them to better serve these populations.
 - Tools to improve the attitudes of members of the JCF toward key populations.
- Some thirty (30) police officers



JASL's Policy and Advocacy Officer, Patrick Lalor (seated) with some members of the St Mary Police Division during a HIV and Human Rights Training session.

were able to benefit from research and data that brought the realities of key populations alive and allowed them to examine how they related to groups such as PLHIV, MSM, Trans people and Sex Workers in the past. They were able to examine these experiences in the context of human rights and determine whether they respected or violated the rights of these groups.

PLHIV AND GAY MAN SHARED EXPERIENCES

The officers were able to listen to a woman living with HIV and a gay man share their experiences of interfacing with the police. While both shared positive experiences, the woman shared an experience of her HIV status being disclosed by the police and the gay man shared experiences of other gay men who were treated in a discriminatory way by the police due to their perceived sexual orientation. As we gathered for this Human Rights training session the

humanity in all of us came to the fore as news broke that a police officer from the St. Mary division allegedly committed suicide. The officer was known to all those present and we had to support as best as we could by allowing them to express how they felt and take a moment to reflect on their lost colleague.

Though traumatic, the experience helped to bring home the point that we are all human beings who share similar experiences regardless of particular differences about us and as such, we should treat all with respect.

Although some of the officers did not make it to the session due to the unfortunate loss of their colleague it was a successful session. We can safely say we have another cadre of officers duly sensitized around HIV and Human Rights and ready to serve all with dignity regardless of their health status, sexual orientation or gender identity.

DEBUNKING condom myths

Wah gwaan Jus' JASL Fam. I hope that you enjoyed our previous post about 5 Myths about HIV. We are all about fun and gimmicks from time to time. But we have to educate you at the same time, because we want our fam to keep safe and 'dweet safe'.

A lot of people's education around sex is to push it in and pull it out. Can't too blame them, because that's just how they were socialized.

I know youths like to explore and go on adventures without knowing the risks that are out there. They seek guidance from their peers, who have little to no knowledge about the same situation that they are in. They are quick to gravitate to stories that sound good to them, not realizing that believing the myths and practic-

ing them is just risky business. So a lot of them engage in unprotected sex, "sowing their wild oats" in a field of possible destruction.

So jus' bill back and hear what we have to share about condoms.

A condom is a contraceptive barrier method which, if used correctly, will protect users from a potential pregnancy and/or an STI. It is usually made from very thin latex, polyurethane or polyisoprene. A condom can be worn on an erect penis or inserted into the vagina during intercourse.

Now that you have a brief understanding of what a condom is and what it is used for, we will debunk a few of the myths that are circulating about them.

1 Skin is better

I'm sure it is. But skin is not an option when you really don't know what you are getting into – literally! Whenever you have unprotected sex, you are exposing yourself to the possibility of contracting HIV and others STIs. So next time when you think about how much you 'love it raw', remember that HIV does too.

2 Condoms do not prevent HIV

Lies! Once condoms are used consistently and correctly it provides protection against HIV.

3 Two is better than one

I am sure we all are eager to have



maximum protection in these unprecedented times. Never, I repeat, NEVER use two condoms at the same time! When you use two condoms, they are more likely to break than if you were just using one condom.

4 Condoms are uncomfortable

If the condom feels uncomfortable, check to see if you have an allergy or if you are wearing the right size.

5 Size doesn't matter

One size fits all: that's true when it comes on to socks, not condoms. Using the right size of condom is important. If the condom you are using is too large it can slip off, and if it is too small, it can break during sex.

The risk is not knowing what you are getting yourself into, so always remember to use a condom every time, get tested for HIV as often as every 3 months. Be safe out there guys.



The more? *the merrier?*

Dear Decoded,

I am 24 years old; I identify as bisexual, and I enjoy having group sex. I must admit that I started having sex a bit later than my peers but at this stage I think I may have more sexual partners than most of them. Being Bi, I can enjoy the best of both worlds, but even with that I don't like one-on-one. I generally enjoy watching porn with multiple persons and enjoy doing the same. I have attended several orgy parties and invited 'friends' over for 'group sessions.' This have affected my relationships in the past as my partners often feel like they are not enough. However, my fear is that I

am at risk of contracting STI. Is my lifestyle putting me more at risk? Doc, what can I do?

- L.T.

“I have attended several orgy parties and invited ‘friends’ over for ‘group sessions.’”

Dear L.T.,
Thank you for sharing your story and being open, honest and vulner-

able about your sexuality and sexual practices. I'm sure that was not an easy feat. This is a no judgement zone and having multiple sex partners is more common than you think. However, I noted that you are concerned about the increased risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection. The short answer to your question is yes, exposure to more sexual partners increases your risk of exposure to different STIs.

What can you do? Safer sex, safer sex, safer sex!

Regular HIV and STI screening for yourself and your partners.

Consistent condom use by all male partners.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis should also be considered as you are at substantial risk of HIV.

Armed with this information, the ball is in your court. Feel free to visit any Jamaica AIDS Support for Life's 3 locations for your free HIV and Syphilis tests as well as for your free condoms.

- Decoded

VIRAL SUPPRESSION

is a journey

One of the main goals of HIV treatment is to reduce a person's Viral Load to an undetectable level.

An undetectable Viral Load means that the level of HIV in the blood is too low to be detected by a Viral Load test. However, the road to viral suppression can be a long and daunting one for clients who present with multiple challenges. These challenges ultimately form barriers that affect how clients respond to treatment. Imagine a healthcare worker working with a client who is experiencing withdrawal, numbness, sadness, anxiety and being in denial about their HIV positive status.

In addition to the psychological effects think about the social impact; unemployment, substance misuse, gender-based violence and lack of family or social support. By now, it is evident that all these compounded issues can lead to poor adherence. Poor adherence equals being unsuppressed! More than just viral suppression, it is critical to help increase the clients' quality of life and well-being.

The question is how does one begin to intervene to address these presenting problems? Despite the challenges as a case manager, I am always excited to work along with my clients to achieve viral

suppression. There are some practices and skills that I would have honed over the years that have equipped me to work through any difficult situations with clients.

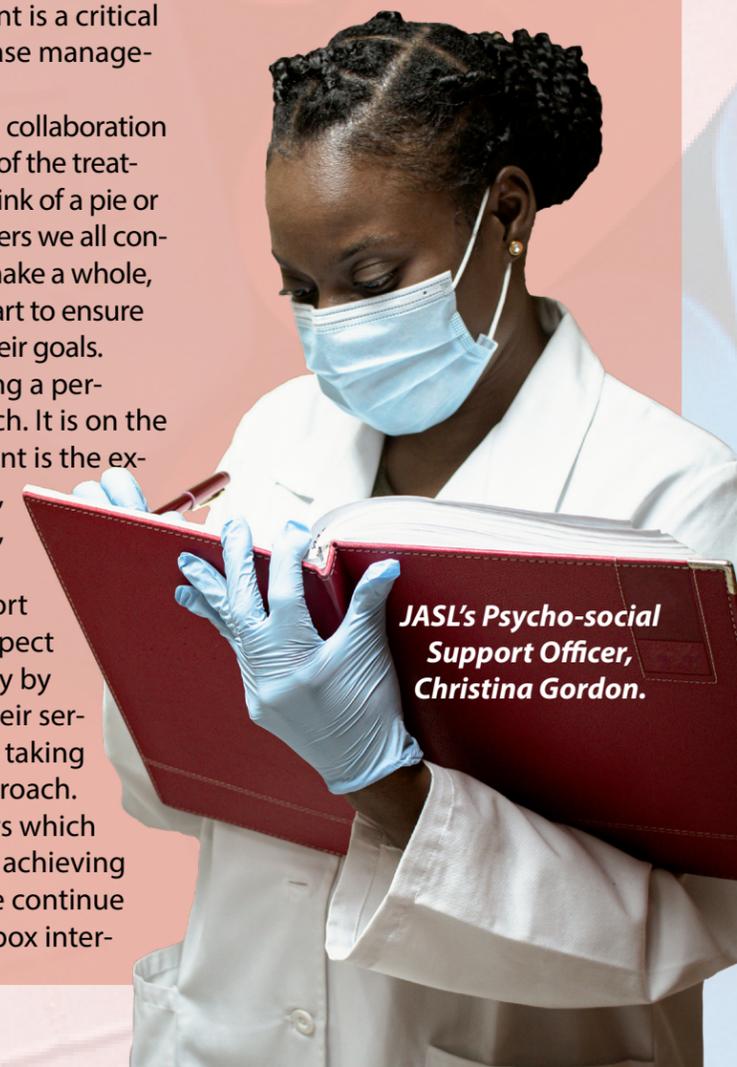
One of the first things that is key in my practice is to understand that every client is at a different place (stages of change anyone?) and one size does not fit all. Because of this notion creating a customized care plan; that is tailoring the care that is suitable to the particular client is a critical component in the case management process.

Secondly, working in collaboration with other members of the treatment team is vital. Think of a pie or pizza, as team members we all contribute our slices to make a whole, and we all play our part to ensure the clients achieve their goals.

Thirdly, by employing a person-centred approach. It is on the premise that the client is the expert in their own life, as the case manager, I am merely guiding and providing support in their process. I respect the clients' autonomy by including them in their service plans and avoid taking an authoritative approach.

Multifaceted barriers which prevent clients from achieving viral suppression, we continue to create out of the box inter-

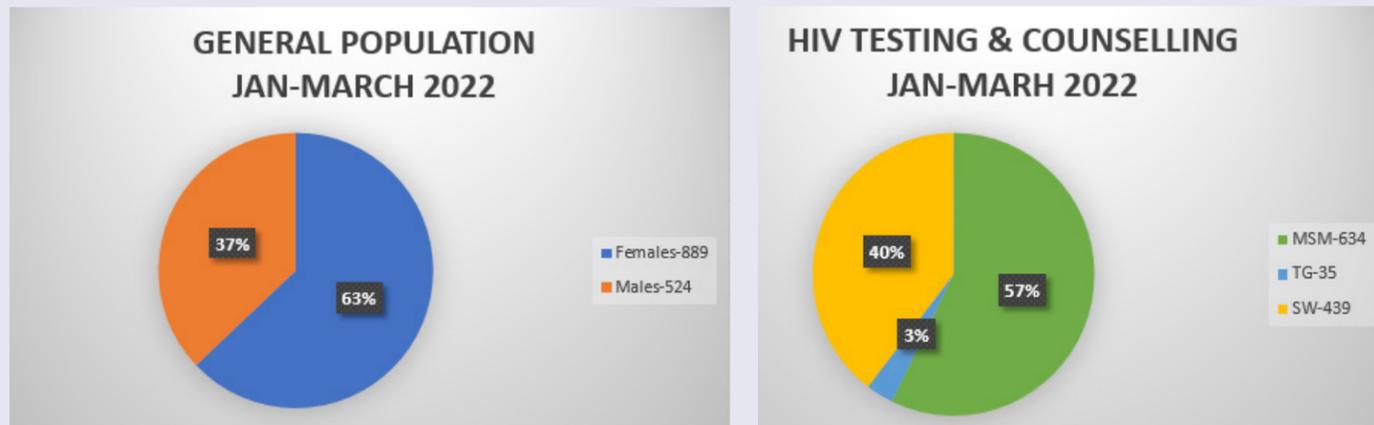
ventions in hopes that they will reap some success. We continue to re-evaluate treatment plans, brainstorm cases in the form of case conferencing, conduct home visits, and provide wellness calls among other interventions. In all that we do, we must celebrate progress with our clients. The pill count score might not have been 100% on the day of adherence counselling session but the fact that the client showed up and took the pills to be counted is progress. Progress made toward viral suppression no matter how small is still progress!



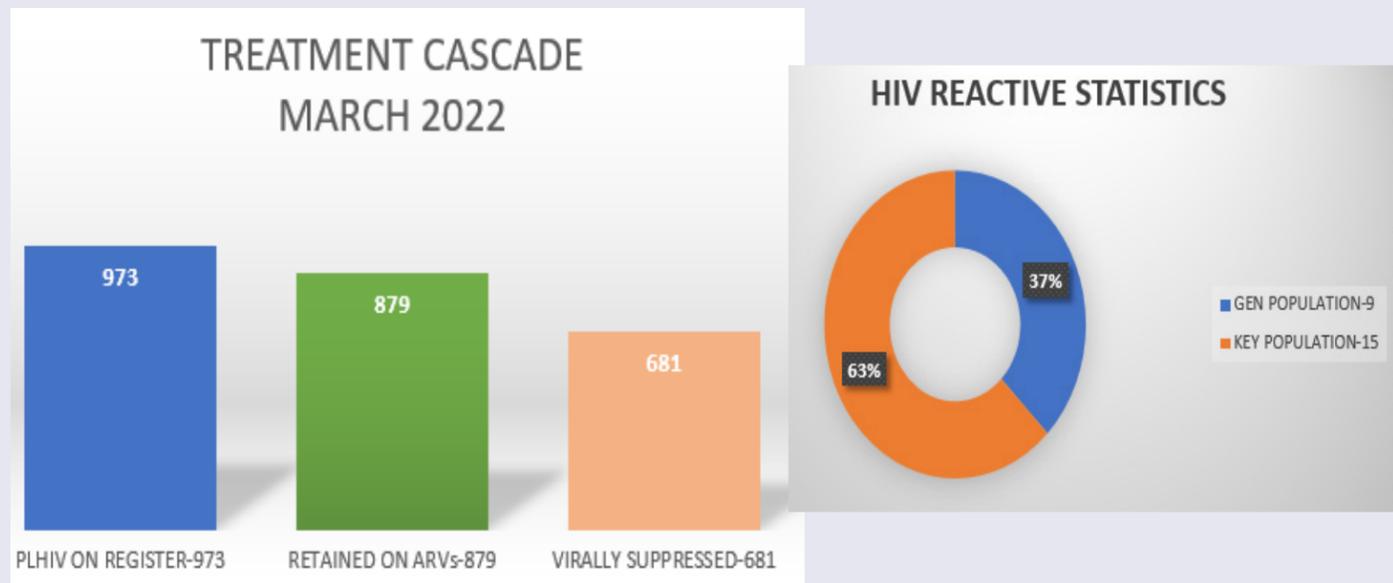
JASL's Psycho-social Support Officer, Christina Gordon.

THE NUMBERS

JASL's Prevention & Treatment Performance for the first quarter of 2022 (January-March)



■ During the first quarter we were able to test 2,521 people across the general and key populations. This is disaggregated as 1413 for the general population and 1108 for the key populations.



■ From those tested, 24 were found reactive to HIV. This is disaggregated as 15 from key population and 9 from the general population.

HIGHLIGHTS

Staff Awards: "One Voice Ignites a Nation"



Each year we pause to celebrate our staff for their consistency and hard-work. Their remarkably contribution to nation building is unparalleled. The pandemic forced us to make this year's Staff Awards virtual, but the work of the team had to be celebrated. This year the St Ann Chapter walked away with the coveted 'Best Chapter Award'.



Former JASL Chairman, Mr. Cannon Garth Minott (left) accepts token from Executive Director, Mrs. Kandasi Walton-Levermore (right), while Chairman, Machel Stewart looks on.



Guest speaker Mr. Raymond Pryce bringing remarks at JASL's 2022 Staff Awards under theme 'One Voice Ignites a Nation.'



St. Ann's Regional Programme Manager, Nilfia Hazel-Anderson strikes a pose with her Long Service Award.



Roger Picton strikes a pose with his Long Service Award.



St. Ann Chapter's Psychologist Debbi-Ann Bailey is excited to receive her Going the Extra Mile Award.

GET BACK ON TRACK GET VAXXED!

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been widespread panic, fear, and increased concern among the population. While the vaccine is now readily available, social media has led to the increase sharing of misinformation and disinformation. However, through the partnership with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) we have been able to support the Jamaican government with its digital and underground efforts. We have launched a campaign dubbed "Get Back on Track... Get Vaxxed!" which is aimed at reaching over 200,000 persons digitally and getting 10,000 vaccinated. Here are a few highlights of our efforts:



Welcome aboard

It is always a joy when new members join our team. Between January and March JASL welcomed six new members of staff.



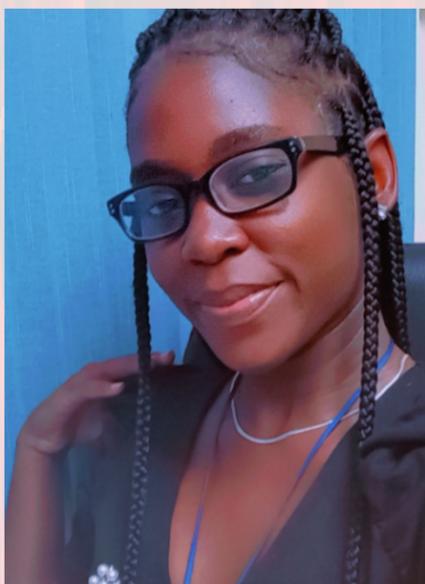
Mr. Hezekiah Hall,
Grants Manager



Ammoy Chung, Peer Naviga-
tor (St. James Chapter)



Ms. Ann-Dean Cooper, Peer
Navigator (St. Ann Chapter)



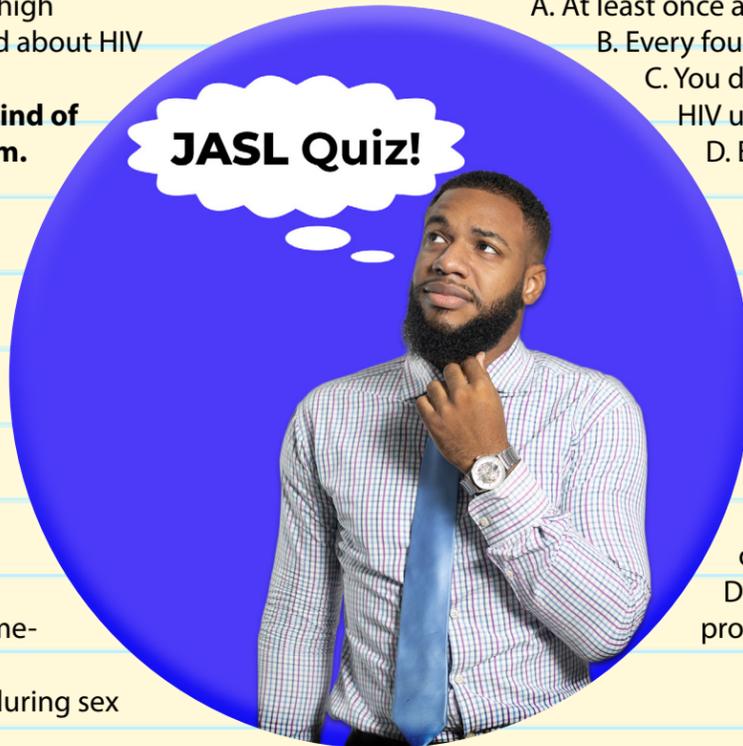
Garcia Barrett,
Case Manager
(Kingston Chapter)



Mr. Francois Whyte,
Targeted Interventions Officer
(St. James Chapter)



Mrs. Tracy-Ann Henry-Jones,
Interventions Officer
(St. Ann Chapter)



1. What does HIV positive mean?

- A. Either antibodies against HIV or the virus particles themselves are present in the blood
- B. You have been tested for HIV
- C. Your white cell count is high
- D. You have been informed about HIV

B. False

8. How often should you get tested for HIV if you are sexually active?

- A. At least once a year
- B. Every four weeks
- C. You don't need to test for HIV unless you're at high-risk
- D. Every 10 years

9. Why should you still use a condom if even on PrEP?

- A. PrEP is not an effective drug
- B. PrEP can cause diabetes
- C. PrEP is only effective against HIV, not other STIs
- D. Prep is not an approved drug by WHO

2. HIV attacks a certain kind of cell in the immune system. Which is it?

- A. Red blood cells
- B. White blood cells called T cells
- C. Platelets
- D. Epithelial cells

3. The risk for HIV/AIDS is tied to behaviours. Which of these behaviours can put you at risk?

- A. Spending time with someone who has AIDS
- B. Not wearing condoms during sex
- C. Injecting drugs
- D. B and C

4. Why is a combination of medicines—called a cocktail—used to treat HIV?

- A. The virus changes (mutates) rapidly
- B. Each person responds to each medicine differently
- C. Combining medicines triples their strength
- D. A and B

5. What is the best way to protect yourself against HIV?

- A. Get yourself vaccinated for HIV
- B. Get on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)
- C. Use a condom during sexual intercourse
- D. B and C

6. HIV can be passed from one person to another by shaking hands.

- A. True
- B. False

7. A person must be HIV Negative to be able to be considered for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

- A. True

For each answer, please fill in marks like this: ● not like this: ✗

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NAME _____

ANSWER SHEET

“School means
EVERYTHING
to me and I can’t
wait for things to
**GET BACK ON
TRACK!”**

“I did my
part,
so should
you!”

Croccifixio Thompson (Stephen),
Youtube series *Balla* - Actor

**GET
VAXXED!**



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

