

Proactively managing HIV & AIDS

Feature Company: Impala Platinum (Implats)

Summary: Over 75% of the world's supply of platinum group metals is mined in southern Africa, where HIV & AIDS infection rates are the highest in the world. The management of HIV & AIDS is therefore a major focus area of IPA member companies. At Impala Platinum's operations in South Africa and Zimbabwe, investment is put into awareness and education programmes, medical care (including free antiretroviral treatment), and community outreach in partnership with NGOs.

The platinum group metals (PGM) industry has significant exposure to HIV & AIDS in its workforce, particularly in southern Africa where HIV & AIDS rates are high, and where 75% of the world's supply of platinum group metals is produced.

As a significant employer in the region, the PGM industry is in a position to influence the course of this disease. The business case for doing so is strong, for both employee well-being and positive financial impacts for companies.

The management of HIV & AIDS is therefore a major focus area of IPA member companies. For example, Impala Platinum Ltd (Implats) operates two facilities in the region – the Bushveld Complex in South Africa, and the Great Dyke in Zimbabwe. The spread of HIV & AIDS and its impact continues to grow at both operations and remains a major focus area for the group's health services and line management alike.

The cost of HIV & AIDS to the company is not easily quantified. There is a direct cost to the company in terms of medical treatment and prevention programmes, and also an impact on productivity in the workplace and on the replacement of skills in an industry where skills are in short supply. There is also a close relationship between pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) and HIV & AIDS. The presence of both infections among the workforce places a significant burden on both the health and well-being of employees and health care providers.



Implats has operations in South Africa and Zimbabwe, which have adult HIV & AIDS infection rates of 18.1% and 15.3%, respectively.

While HIV & AIDS is not an occupational illness, it is a critical element of Implats' occupational health care management strategy. This strategy also addresses other chronic life-threatening illnesses, including TB.

There are three broad areas within Implats' programme:

- Through awareness and education programmes, and, in particular, the use of peer educators, efforts are made to prevent the further spread of the disease to employees, their families and other members of the community. A key component of this initiative is to encourage employees to know and understand their HIV status through the Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) programme.
- Through medical care, such as provision of antiretroviral treatment (ART) to employees and their dependents, so that they can lead healthy lives and continue to work.
- To extend the HIV & AIDS programmes into the communities in the areas in which the company operates and where employees live by funding and partnering with NGOs who provide HIV-related services.

In 2009, a total of 6 263 employees underwent HIV & AIDS testing, and 1 296 employees and dependants received ART through the company's medical facilities. However, that same year, 122 patients died in service as a result of known AIDS-related illnesses and a further 116 people left the company due to HIV-related medical issues. These numbers underscore why Implats, amongst other IPA member companies, will continue to keep HIV & AIDS as a focus area for years to come.



At Impala Medical Services, Rustenburg, there has been a positive response to voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) and anti-retroviral therapy (ART) programmes put in place to address the HIV & AIDS pandemic.

Source: Implats

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