

A little ignorance is a dangerous thing. Dangerous, because it so easily leads to fear - and when we are fearful about ourselves and our loved



d decisions. For me the facts are always friendly. Why? Because if I
d make the right decisions.

Knowing about the state of our health is a friendly fact, in these days when so much can be done for people if only they are clear about what their situation is. And yet some areas of our public health - such as HIV - are still surrounded by clouds of denial and even shame. So all too many people don't know their HIV status, and don't want to know.

For this reason, for HIV Testing Week, I took an HIV test myself. I wanted to encourage everyone, in every community, to know how easy and straightforward it is to do so. I wanted to let people know about the sensitive caring, loving and discreet way in which our health professionals administer the test and support the patient.

It's just a pinprick. A simple, pain free test. And the staff I dealt with were lovely, putting me completely at ease. And I believe the healthcare experts who say that it will greatly help our health as a nation if millions more people knew their HIV status for sure, wiping away uncertainty and halting the risk of the infection being unwittingly passed on.

I took the test to show there need be no stigma in this part of our common life, and to encourage others to find out for sure. If you have always wondered what your status is, and perhaps have been pushing this to the back of your mind, then take heart. Go take the test; it's simple, painless and free. Become sure of your own HIV status and be part of a nation which faces the health-future with confidence

Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool
