

YOUR CARE POLMED

December 2025

“Life is better in
summer”

Anonymous

Dear POLMED Member,

December arrives with festive energy, long summer days, and a well-earned break for many. But even when you slow down, your health shouldn't take a holiday, especially when it comes to your skin. Whether you're heading to the coast or relaxing at home, keep the basics close: your hat, sunglasses, and most importantly, SPF.

This month is Skin Cancer Awareness Month in South Africa, and we're unpacking why this cancer is so prevalent, ways you can protect yourself and your family, and the warning signs you should be aware of. December also marks World AIDS Day, and we're highlighting how you can reduce your risk of infection — plus the ways POLMED supports members who test positive.

Finally, as the year draws to a close, we turn our focus to mental wellbeing. The festive season can be uplifting, but it can also be emotionally demanding. Our infographic, Mind Over Stigma: Why Mental Health Matters, explores why mental health should be recognised, respected, and supported all year round, and why breaking the stigma starts with awareness, understanding, and compassion.

Wishing you a healthy, joyful month filled with festive cheer and responsible time in the sun!

Yours in health,
The YourCare Team

In this issue...

HIV PREVENTION IN 2025: THE POWER OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

On 1 December every year, we observe World AIDS Day, a campaign to raise awareness around one of the most impactful diseases of the century. While there has been significant progress in combating HIV infection, there has been a decline in HIV testing over the last few years, which has resulted in undiagnosed and untreated cases.

> [READ MORE...](#)

SUN SMART, SKIN SAFE: PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST SKIN CANCER

With around 22 000 new cases and almost 900 related deaths annually, skin cancer remains one of the most diagnosed cancers in South Africa. Yet, it can be prevented. Skin Cancer Awareness Month aims to raise awareness of education and early detection.

> [READ MORE...](#)

MIND OVER STIGMA: WHY MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS,

As the year winds down, the pressure to finish strong, celebrate hard, and “hold it together” can take its toll. Supporting mental wellbeing is a vital part of overall health and quality of life, especially during the festive season.

> [READ MORE...](#)



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HIV Prevention in 2025: The Power of Collective Action

While there has been significant progress in combating HIV infection, there has been a decline in HIV testing over the last few years, which has resulted in undiagnosed and untreated cases.

TODAY, IT'S ESTIMATED THAT

12.9%



OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN POPULATION IS LIVING WITH HIV.

On **1 December**, we observe World AIDS Day, a campaign to raise awareness around one of the most impactful diseases of the century.

THE HIV FIGHT STILL MATTERS

As a result of the work of government, communities and health bodies, bolstered by an extensive rollout of antiretroviral therapy (ART),

new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths have dropped by **40%** and **56%**, respectively, since 2010.



However, stigma and misinformation remain significant challenges to overcome.

GETTING TESTED

One way to curb HIV infection is by knowing your status, and the only way to do so is by getting tested. Knowing your HIV status allows you to make informed health decisions and protect your surrounding community. It's important to get tested for HIV at least once a year, especially if you face an ongoing risk of infection.

Remember that you are covered for HIV screening under the POLMED Screening Benefit.

BEYOND CONDOMS

While condoms are the most common form of HIV prevention, PrEP and PEP can also be effective.

PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis):

This is a **daily pill taken by individuals who are HIV-negative, yet are at ongoing risk of infection**, perhaps through the sharing of needles or through unprotected sex.

PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis):

While it can be **taken within 72 hours of potential HIV exposure**, the sooner one starts this 28-day antiretroviral medication, the more effective it can be. If you believe you may have been exposed to HIV, either through unprotected sexual encounters or needle use, you should immediately consult your nearest clinic or public health centre.

With the theme of "Let Communities Lead" this year, World AIDS Day remains a vital call for individuals to do their part in shaping the future of HIV prevention and care – raising awareness, challenging stigma, testing routinely, and adopting safe and responsible habits.

POLMED HIV MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

Many people infected by HIV lead healthy, happy, and long lives. Many actions can help your body better deal with the virus and delay the development of AIDS. Your emotional and mental state also play a significant role in how you manage your condition.

Our HIV Management Programme aims to improve the quality of life for members living with HIV/AIDS.

What Does the Programme Offer?

- Access to antiretroviral therapy (ARVs)
- Regular medical check-ups and lab tests
- Consultations with your GP
- Mental health and counselling support
- Pre- and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP & PEP)
- Support for family planning and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT)
- Medication delivery options
- Vaccinations to prevent common illnesses

Please contact the **POLMED HIV programme on 0800 22 7700**, or email at **polmedhiv@medscheme.co.za** for further information.



**THIS PROGRAMME IS
STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.**

HOW TO REGISTER:

If you are worried that you might be infected with HIV, ask your doctor or clinic to test you. This test will be paid for, and only you and your doctor will be informed of the results.

You and your treating doctor will receive the authorisation and Care Plan.

Submit your completed and signed application form to POLMED: **polmedhiv@medscheme.co.za**
Fax: **0800 600 773**
Post: PO Box 38597, Pinelands 7430

If the results show that you are HIV positive:

- Contact POLMED's HIV Management Programme on **0860 765 633/0860 100 646** and ask for an application form.
- Access the HIV application form on the POLMED website: **www.polmed.co.za** (go to 'FORMS', select 'Manage Care (Medical)', and then 'HIV Application') or from a regional walk-in branch.
- Your doctor will examine you and help complete the form. Your doctor will be paid for completing the form.

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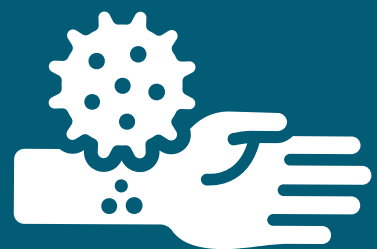
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Sun Smart, Skin Safe: Protect Yourself Against Skin Cancer

With around **22 000** new cases and almost **900** related deaths annually,



skin cancer remains one of the most commonly diagnosed cancers in South Africa.

Yet, it can be prevented. **Skin Cancer Awareness Month** aims to spotlight on education and early detection.

WHAT IS SKIN CANCER?

Skin cancer is a condition in which abnormal skin cells begin to grow out of control, often triggered by overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun or artificial sources like tanning beds. It is the most common form of cancer globally and there are three main types:

- 1. Basal cell carcinoma:** Accounting for **17.9%** of all cancers
- 2. Squamous cell carcinoma:** The fourth most diagnosed cancer
- 3. Melanoma:** Considered the most dangerous, due to its ability to spread quickly to different parts of the body

AM I AT RISK?

A new mole is often the first sign, so follow the **ABCDE** guideline:



Asymmetrical
One half of the mole doesn't look like the other.



Border
The edges are irregular and poorly defined.



Colour
Varies in colour, from brown to black, or even blue.



Diameter
It's about 6mm, almost the size of a new pencil eraser (although cancerous moles can be smaller).



Evolving
It continues to change in shape, shade and size, and may even begin to bleed or itch.



If you notice any changes on your body that align with the **ABCDE** guidelines, please consult your doctor.

Simple daily habits can ensure healthy skin:

Avoid the sun between 10:00 and 16:00.



Avoid UV tanning beds and tanning.



Cover up with sun-protective clothing and wear UV-blocking sunglasses.



Use a broad-spectrum UVA/UVB sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher daily.



Check your body for new moles, especially between your toes, on your back and behind your ears.



For more information contact us:
POLMED Disease Risk Management Programme on
0860 765 633 or email polmeddiseaseman@medscheme.co.za

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Mind Over Stigma: Why you need to seek help?

With nearly one in three South African adults living with impaired mental health, this campaign highlights the importance of treating mental health and wellness as a universal human right.



STEPS TO TAKE TO HELP YOU COPE.

RAISING AWARENESS

With one in five South Africans expected to experience poor mental health at some point in their lives, education and awareness around conditions such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and bipolar mood disorders is key. It's also crucial to highlight the importance of early intervention, self-care therapies, and seeking help.

REDUCING STIGMA

Despite growing conversations around mental health, stigma still prevents many individuals from speaking up or seeking treatment. Research suggests that while 70% of women and 65% of men report a need for mental health support, men are four times more likely to die by suicide than women.

PROMOTING ACTION

Mental health conditions affect one in four South Africans, yet access to care and funding remain limited. By raising awareness, starting conversations, and fostering understanding in our workplaces, schools, and communities, we can help build a society that values mental wellbeing as deeply as physical health.

Poor mental health can affect anyone, irrespective of race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, or ethnicity. With so many countries participating in World Mental Health Day, a shared commitment to improving mental wellbeing reinforces international solidarity and reminds us that we're not alone.

TAKE
**ACTION
NOW**

If you've been diagnosed with depression, bipolar disorder, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), you can register on POLMED's Disease Management Programme. We're here to support you with:

- A personalised care plan will be issued for out-of-hospital treatment.
- Telephonic support by a mental health case manager.
- Paid from risk, so your out-of-hospital benefits will not be affected.

To register:

Email: polmeddiseasemanagement@medscheme.co.za | Call: **0860 765 633**

Take the first step toward better mental health support today!

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