



POLMED

OUR INVESTMENT OUR HEALTH OUR FUTURE



YOUR CARE POLMED

February 2026

“Love yourself enough
to live a healthy
lifestyle.”

Anonymous

Dear POLMED Member,

February is the month of love, and a timely reminder that caring for your health is one of the most important forms of self-love. This month, we also mark STI & Condom Week, shining a light on sexual health, prevention, and the role informed choices play in protecting both you and your partners. Whether you’re in a long-term, committed relationship or single and playing the field, we’re sharing practical, judgment-free information to help you stay safe, confident, and in control of your health.

Beyond matters of the heart, we’re also tackling some important conversations that affect many South Africans. We debunk common myths around epilepsy, because understanding leads to empathy and better support for those living with the condition. As we continue to fight cancer, we look at how awareness, early detection and collective support can make a real difference for those impacted, as well as the survivors who inspire us every day.

Because love isn’t just about romance, it’s about showing up for your body, your mind, and each other.

As always, we are here to support you.

Yours in health,
The YourCare Team

In this issue...

PROTECTION IS EMPOWERMENT

STI/Condom Week, commemorated in February, seeks to promote conversations around sexual health, expand access to protection, and ensure that you are equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to make informed choices.

> [READ MORE...](#)

A UNITED AND GLOBAL FIGHT AGAINST CANCER

This World Cancer Day, with the theme “United by unique”, we’re reminded that every cancer journey is as individual as we are, and it will require a collective effort to provide more inclusive care.

> [READ MORE...](#)

BEYOND THE SEIZURES: UNDERSTANDING EPILEPSY

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that affects just over 630,000 South Africans. Yet, despite its high prevalence, the condition is still plagued by misconceptions and myths, which can impact levels of care.

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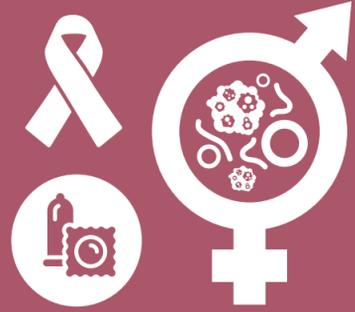
February 2026



Protection is empowerment

HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) remain a significant public health challenge.

STI/Condom Week, commemorated in February, seeks to promote conversations around sexual health, expand access to protection, and ensure that you are equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to make informed choices.



COMMON STIs

STIs are generally infections transmitted through sexual contact.

According to a 2025 report:

93.2% of the men  and **37.2%** of the  women

who were being treated symptomatically for an STI at clinics in South Africa between 2021 and 2024 had one or more STIs.

Most common STIs:

- HIV
- Human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Genital herpes (HSV-2)
- Chlamydia
- Gonorrhoea



STI SYMPTOMS

Symptoms include:

- Unusual vaginal and penile discharge
- Pain during urination
- Bumps and sores around genital, mouth and anal area
- Swelling or intense itching around genital area
- Painful sex



EFFECTS ON YOUR HEALTH

STIs can increase the risk for:

- HIV infection
- Infertility
- Stillborn births and miscarriages
- Organ damage
- Heart disease
- Neurological disease



PROTECTION AGAINST HIV, STIs, AND UNPLANNED PREGNANCY

The most effective way to protect against HIV, STIs, and unplanned/unwanted pregnancies is through the use of condoms.

A few things to remember for using a condom correctly:

1. Make sure the penis is fully erect.
2. Open the packet carefully.
3. Hold the tip of the condom to squeeze out any air.
4. Roll the condom all the way down to the base of the penis. If the condom doesn't roll down, discard it and use a new condom.
5. After sex, grip the base of the condom as you withdraw, to stop it from coming off the penis.
6. Always throw away used condoms in the bin, not in the toilet.



Using a female condom correctly: Before Sex (Insertion)

1. **Check & prepare:** Read instructions, check the expiration date, and ensure the condom has no tears.
2. **Lubricate:** Add water-based lubricant inside and/or on the outer ring for comfort and to help it stay in place.
3. **Insert:** Squeeze the inner ring together and insert it into the vagina, pushing it up until it reaches the cervix, like a tampon.
4. **Position:** The outer ring should stay outside the vaginal opening, covering the perineum.



After Sex (Removal)

1. **Twist:** While still lying down, twist the outer ring to trap semen inside.
2. **Pull Out:** Gently pull the condom out, keeping it level to avoid spills.
3. **Dispose:** Throw the used condom in the trash; do not flush it down the toilet.

Protection is empowerment. STI/Condom Week is a reminder of the critical role condoms play in protecting your and your loved ones' health. There are additional measures that protect against STIs including open communication, sticking to one sexual partner, HIV PrEP, vaccination against HPV and ensuring that if you are diagnosed with an STI, all your sexual partners also get treated.

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- <https://www.phbsa.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Microbiological-surveillance-of-STI-syndromes-in-SA.pdf>
- [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-\(stis\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/sexually-transmitted-infections-(stis))
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A united and global fight against cancer

Over **18 million new cancer cases** were diagnosed worldwide in 2023, and **over 100 000 new cancer cases** are recorded annually in South Africa.

In 2024, there were 1 898 POLMED beneficiaries with cancer, with 618 of those being newly diagnosed. This World Cancer Day, with the theme “United by unique”, we’re reminded that every cancer journey is as individual as we are, and it will require a collective effort to provide more inclusive care.

PROMOTING EARLY DETECTION

If caught early, the survival rate for the most diagnosed types of cancer can be quite high. **In the POLMED population, the Top 5 most commonly occurring cancers are:**



Breast cancer
(in women)



Prostate cancer
(in men)



Colon cancer



Leukaemia
(a type of blood cancer)



Multiple myeloma
(another type of blood cancer)

Remember that as a POLMED member, you’re covered for certain preventative screening tests for breast, cervical, and prostate cancer:



Mammogram
All women aged 40-74.
Once every two years



Pap smear
All women aged 21 – 64.
Once every three years



HPV screening
All women aged 21 – 64.
Once every three years



HPV vaccination
Girls aged 10 – 17.
Two vaccinations covered



Prostate screening
All men aged 50 – 75, annually.

If you’d like more information on POLMED’s Oncology Care plans, or would like to register, contact our Oncology Care Management Programme:



Tel
0860 765 633



Fax
0860 000 340



Email
polmedonco@medscheme.co.za

Through regular screenings, such as mammograms, Pap smears, digital rectal examinations (DREs) and prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood tests, we can give ourselves and our communities a better chance at prevention, treatment and survival. It is also important that children are taken for their regular health checks to ensure that early symptoms and signs are not missed.

HONOURING SURVIVORS AND CAREGIVERS

Surviving cancer is an incredible feat. Honouring survivors not only inspires hope and resilience and acknowledges the dedication of their caregivers during their darkest moments but also encourages others to seek medical advice and undergo regular screenings.



TAKING ACTION

Cancer is a global fight, and every action matters – whether it’s volunteering to assist affected people and their families, donating money, clothes or other items, or sharing information on social media. These actions and others encourage screening and increase awareness.

Cancer touches millions of lives, and by supporting and promoting the right tools and services this World Cancer Day, we can create a world united by our uniqueness, where appropriate care is accessible, compassionate and effective for all.



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- <https://gco.iarc.who.int/media/globocan/factsheets/populations/710-south-africa-fact-sheet.pdf>
- Medscheme Oncology Reports for POLMED

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Beyond the seizures: Understanding Epilepsy

Epilepsy is a neurological condition that affects just over

630 000 South Africans, with nearly 5 200 POLMED beneficiaries registered as having epilepsy.



Yet, despite its high prevalence, the condition is still plagued by misconceptions and myths, which means that around

80% → 90%

of those living with epilepsy in sub-Saharan Africa



don't receive the necessary treatment, support and protection.

BUSTING EPILEPSY MYTHS

MYTH: Epilepsy is a demonic possession.

FACT: Epilepsy is a medical condition where affected people have episodes of seizures, also known as convulsions or fits. This is where part of the body or the whole body shakes uncontrollably for a short time

MYTH: Epilepsy is contagious.

FACT: Epilepsy cannot spread from one person to another.

While 50% of cases have no known cause, the condition has been linked to:



Brain injury due to lack of oxygen, etc



Certain genetic conditions or syndromes



Severe head injuries



A stroke



Brain infections such as meningitis



Brain tumours

MYTH: People living with epilepsy can't lead normal lives.

FACT: Around 80% of individuals living with epilepsy can control their seizures with medicine, and, with proper management and support, they can live full and active lives.

MYTH: During an epileptic seizure, you can swallow your tongue.

FACT: It is medically impossible to swallow your tongue.

SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS WITH EPILEPSY

Seizures are a common symptom of epilepsy, so it's important to know what to do if someone experiences a seizure.

1 Stay calm and keep the person safe from potential injury.



2 Check the person's wrists for any medical bracelets.



3 Don't restrain the person or put anything in their mouth.



4 If they're lying down, turn them on their left side to prevent them from choking on saliva or vomit.



5 Call an ambulance if seizures last more than 5 minutes or if they have several seizures (one after the other) without time to recover in between.



6 Once the seizure is over, sit them somewhere safe so they can recover. Most people with epilepsy are sleepy/drowsy for 5 to 30 minutes after their seizures as they recover.



By commemorating National Epilepsy Week, we can raise awareness around the condition and challenge the stigma associated with it. Through this, we can create a more informed society, and ensure that those living with epilepsy are empowered, supported and treated with dignity.



NEED HELP OF MORE INFORMATION?

Contact the Chronic Medicine Management Programme on **0860 765 633**, or email polmedcmm@medscheme.co.za

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- <https://www.statssa.gov.za/?p=17430>
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