

# Rape makes women more vulnerable to HIV Aids

La Femme Correspondent

JOHANNESBURG – Women who are raped must acknowledge the risk of contracting HIV from their attacker and contact their doctor or the nearest casualty clinic as soon as possible.

Dr Lynne Webber, a member of the National Pathology Group (NPG), said the physical trauma of rape meant victims were particularly vulnerable to contracting HIV.

The risk was far higher than the danger a doctor faced from a needle stick injury, she said.

Fortunately, rape victims can now access post exposure prophylaxis to prevent them from contracting HIV – but time is of the essence.

“Rape is a horrifying experience and the victim has many terrible realities to deal with in the aftermath of the attack,” said Dr Webber.

“However, it is very important that she think of herself first, acknowledge the potential risk of HIV, see a

*Today is World Aids Day – and it also marks the end of the first week of the 16 Days of Activism campaign for no violence against women and children. All too often, the two are tragically related.*

doctor, and take that first tablet.

“Although there is a 72-hour window in which victims can take their first ‘anti-HIV’ pill, the reality is that the sooner you start treatment, the better your chances of not contracting the virus.”

She advised rape victims to choose the strongest possible course of drugs available in their own defence.

“It is an all-or-nothing situation. You only get one chance to fight infection,” she said.

Patients are given a 28-day course of three drugs, usually Combivir (a combination of AZT and 3TC) and Stocrin.

Although there can be side effects

like severe nausea, patients must continue to take the medication as prescribed for it to be effective.

One month’s discomfort is a small price to pay to protect yourself against a lifelong – and deadly – infection.

At the time of the rape, a doctor will take a blood sample to establish a baseline HIV profile.

The patient must then return to the clinic for a blood test to establish an antibody count at six weeks, three months and six months.

A clean bill of health at three months is likely to indicate she has not contracted HIV.

However, a six-month check-up is advised for absolute peace of mind.



**STRONG VOICE . . . Premier Nosi Mkhabela spoke out strongly when launching the 16 Days of Activism campaign last week.**

□ “Zuki addresses Aids in the workplace” – Page 11