Fighting a deadly fungus:
A new strategy to reduce deaths due to Cryptococcus

Cryptococcal meningitis is a leading cause of death among people living with HIV. In sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated to kill more people than tuberculosis.

What is Cryptococcus?

Cryptococcus is a fungus that is found in the soil and produces spores that can be inhaled. People can get Cryptococcus early in life but never know it. If a person’s immune system is weakened (for example, by HIV), Cryptococcus can cause a life-threatening infection called cryptococcal meningitis.

Why is Cryptococcus a major public health issue?

- It is a leading cause of death among people living with HIV.
- Cryptococcus is the most common cause of meningitis in Africa. Meningitis develops after the dormant fungus has been reactivated. For people living with HIV, it can be triggered when their CD4+ count drops.
- Cryptococcal meningitis mortality is high (50–70%).
- In developing countries, medication to treat cryptococcal meningitis is often unavailable or too expensive.
- Management of cryptococcal meningitis is intensive, requiring frequent lumbar punctures and lifelong medication.
By 2015, equip one-half of all HIV clinics in Africa and Asia to perform *Cryptococcus* testing and treatment. This could save 50,000–100,000 lives each year.