



Know Your Status

Getting Yourself Tested for HIV



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HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks the immune system and can cause AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) if left untreated. With on-going treatment, however, people living with HIV can live long and healthy lives. HIV can have no symptoms for up to a decade, so the only way to know if you have HIV is to get yourself tested! Talk to your partner(s) about getting tested, too.

How do you get HIV and how do you prevent it?

HIV is transmitted when any of the following fluids contain HIV and enter the bloodstream of someone who does not have HIV, usually through sex or sharing needles:

- Blood
- Semen
- Pre-ejaculate (pre-cum)
- Vaginal fluids
- Breast milk
- Rectal mucous

There are many ways to prevent HIV:

- Not engaging in sexual activity
- Using barriers (condoms, dental dams and/or capes) during sexual activity
- Not sharing needles
- Taking some medications (PrEP or PEP) as directed by a health care provider. Keep reading for more on PrEP and PEP.

Should I get myself tested?

Ask yourself the following:

Have you ever:

- had at least one HIV test?
- had oral, vaginal and/or anal sex without barriers (condoms, dental dams and/or capes)?
- shared needles or works (for drugs, tattoos, body piercings, steroids, hormones, etc.)?
- had a sexually transmitted infection (STI)?
- Have you had a sexual partner who did not know their HIV status?

If you answered “yes” to any of the above questions, then seriously consider getting yourself tested for HIV.

Remember, HIV testing is not automatically included when your blood is drawn or during any routine healthcare visit, so always make sure to ask to be tested!

If you think you’ve been exposed to HIV in the last 72 hours, talk to your health care provider about post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) right away.

How often should I get myself tested for HIV?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone ages 13-64 get tested for HIV at least once in their lifetime, and that all sexually active adults age 25 and younger be tested at least annually.

If you have multiple sexual partners, share needles, or if barriers (condoms, dental dams, or capes) are not used each time you have sex, then you might benefit from more frequent testing.

Everyone’s risks for HIV are different, so talk to your health care provider about a testing frequency that works best for you.

What is the “window period” for HIV testing?

It is important to remember that no test can detect HIV immediately after infection because it takes 3 to 12 weeks for antibodies to build up to a detectable level. This time between infection and detection is called the “window period.” It is still possible to transmit HIV while in the window period, and in fact, transmission is much more likely because there is a large amount of HIV in the body at this time. This is why getting tested for HIV regularly is important.

If you’re still in the testing window period but concerned that you might have been exposed to HIV, there are steps you can take to protect yourself and your partner(s) until you know your HIV status:

- Consider taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) within 72 hours of your possible exposure.
- If you aren’t abstaining from sexual activity, use barriers (condoms, dental dams, or capes) consistently and correctly to protect your partner(s).
- If you use needles to inject, do not share them.

What kinds of tests are offered? When will I get the results?

Blood testing: With this type of test, a small amount of blood is taken from one of your veins and sent to a lab. Results are usually ready in a few days to a week.

Rapid testing: With this type of test, a small amount of blood or oral fluid is taken from you and tested right away. Most places will be able to give you results within an hour. Your local pharmacy might also carry rapid tests that can be used at home. Rapid testing is only a preliminary screening test—preliminary positive (reactive) results need to be confirmed by a blood test.

No matter how long it takes to get your results, it is important that you get them. Consider talking with a friend, someone you trust, or a health care professional if you need support while waiting for your results.

What do the test results mean?

If Your Test Result is NEGATIVE

- If you are in the window period, then you could still have HIV. Talk to your health care provider about when you should get tested again.
- Keep taking actions to protect yourself from HIV, including using barriers during sexual activity and not sharing needles.

If Your Test Result is POSITIVE

- You may need a follow-up test to confirm the result.
- Discuss treatment options and support resources with your health care provider. The sooner you can start treatment, the better.
- Remember that HIV is manageable if treated!



PrEP and PEP: Medications that Prevent HIV

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a prescription medication that is over 90% effective at preventing HIV when taken daily as directed. PrEP is usually prescribed to people who are at a higher risk for HIV (i.e., multiple partners, inconsistent barrier use, in a sexual relationship with someone who is living with HIV, shares needles, etc.). Talk with health care provider about whether or not PrEP is right for you.

To find a PrEP provider near you, visit <https://prelocator.org>.

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is a prescription medication that can be taken up to 72 hours after a possible HIV exposure to prevent HIV. The sooner it is taken, the more effective it will be, so get to your health care provider as soon as possible if you think you need it.

Where can I get myself tested?

HIV testing is widely available from most health care providers, including your campus health center. Local health departments or community AIDS service organizations may offer HIV testing as well. You can also visit gettested.cdc.gov to find testing sites near you.

How much will it cost?

Some sites offer free testing while others charge a fee, and fees may vary depending on the type of test you get. In most cases, your health insurance company must offer STI/HIV counseling and preventative testing annually without charging a co-pay or deductible. Check with your insurance carrier first.

What should I do if I test positive for HIV?

If a follow-up test confirms that you have HIV, it is important that you speak with a health care provider about treatment options—and then follow your treatment plan accordingly. Not only will on-going treatment keep you healthy, but it will also greatly reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to your partner(s).

Reach out to your health care provider, sexual health clinic, or local AIDS service organization to get connected to resources and find support. You might also consider telling a trusted friend or family member. While you take time to process your diagnosis, be gentle with yourself and practice self-care. An HIV diagnosis can be scary, but it does not make you any less of a person.

Is my HIV test anonymous or confidential?

Like all medical records, an HIV test result is confidential. Only people who have access to your medical records can see the results. Check with the testing site first to learn about your testing options and state laws regarding reporting. If you do not want your name linked to your test, ask if anonymous testing is available.

How can I talk with my partner(s) about getting tested?

This conversation can be awkward, but it doesn't have to be! Here are four tips to help you talk to your partner(s) about HIV testing:

- Talk about testing for HIV (and other STIs!) before any sexual activity. Here are some conversation starters:
- I got myself tested last month and my results were _____. What about you?
- Have you ever been tested for STIs and HIV?
- Your profile says you are HIV-negative. When was the last time you got yourself tested?
- Choose a place in which you feel safe and comfortable, whether that is online or in person.
- Know what you are going to say before you say it, and emphasize that you care about your partner's health as well as your own. If you are nervous, consider practicing in front of a mirror or with someone you know and trust.
- If you feel safe doing so, suggest that you go together to get tested. This may show your partner that your motives are about care and respect instead of distrust. You will also have an immediate support system throughout the testing process.

If you plan to go abroad, you may be required to get an HIV test for VISA purposes. You will usually be required to have your name on your test results.

For More Information

Contact your campus health center or local AIDS service organizations for help. You can also call the hotlines or visit the websites listed below.

CDC Information

(800) CDC-INFO (232-4636)

TTY: (888) 232-6348

In English en Español

www.cdc.gov/std

CDC National HIV/STI Testing Resources

Gettested.cdc.gov or HIV.gov

National Institutes of Health

AIDS Info Hotline

(800) HIV-0440 (448-0440)

<http://aidsinfo.nih.gov>

American College Health Association

(410) 859-1500 | www.acha.org

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