

HIV testing fact sheet

Testing is the only way to know if you have HIV.



Get all the facts about HIV testing from this fact sheet.

Why test for HIV

- Testing is the only way to know for sure if you have HIV
- Knowing your status means you can keep yourself and your sexual partners healthy
- Being diagnosed early gives you a better chance of living a long and healthy life
- It's quick, easy and almost always free

When should I test for HIV?

Take a test if you are...

- not always using condoms
- sharing needles or using syringes when injecting drugs
- pregnant
- breastfeeding.

Even if you haven't recently put yourself at risk of infection, getting an HIV test at least once a year is a good habit to get into to check your sexual health if you are sexually active.

Where to get an HIV test?

HIV testing is available at many healthcare clinics, hospitals, sexual health clinics, and community services.

Free HIV testing is widely available in many countries. Otherwise, the cost of an HIV test depends on your clinic and location.

You can search online for 'HIV testing' plus your location to find the nearest place to get an HIV test in your area.

In some places, self-testing kits may also be available so you can test in the privacy of your home if you prefer. It's still always best to talk to a health worker once you have your result.

Know your rights

HIV testing should...

- Involve your full consent
- be confidential
- give you an opportunity to speak to a professional about what's involved
- give you a positive or negative result
- depending on your results, give you information on further treatment or prevention services

How does HIV testing work?

You can test for HIV at any time, but it can take up to 3 months after exposure for HIV tests to detect an infection (called the window period).

Your healthcare worker will be able to suggest the type of HIV test that's best for you.

Your healthcare worker will take either...

- a blood sample
- an oral fluid sample

Getting your results

The time between testing and getting the results depends on the type of test you have.

- Rapid test and self-testing kit results are ready in 30 minutes or less
- Laboratory test results can take a few days to a few weeks to return results

Modern HIV tests are very accurate, but positive results require a second blood sample to confirm an HIV infection.

What happens next?

Receiving a positive result

This means that HIV has been detected in your body - but don't worry, there is treatment for HIV that will keep you healthy. Your test results are only shared with health workers involved in your care. They should advise you on...

- referral onto a treatment plan
- if pregnant, starting you on treatment to prevent transmission to your baby
- where to get information and support for living with HIV
- taking precautions if living with or travelling in places with a high tuberculosis (TB) prevalence

Starting treatment straight away can ensure that you remain healthy and reduces your chances of passing HIV onto others.

Receiving a negative result

This means that you don't have HIV, but remember to get the facts on staying negative.

- protect yourself during sex by using condoms
- Find out about pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) as an option to protect against HIV.
- If you inject drugs, do it safely - don't share needles or syringes.
- Have regular tests for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- If you've taken an HIV test within the window period since exposure, test again after 3 months.

If you've had unprotected sex or shared needles or syringes to inject drugs since your last HIV test - test again!

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