

# When to get tested for HIV?



## FAST FACTS

- If you've put yourself at risk, it's best to speak to a healthcare professional immediately.
- Get tested regularly (once a year) - it's an important part of good sexual health.
- If you're pregnant, it's important to be tested for HIV - most countries offer this as part of their antenatal care routine. It's possible to prevent transmission from mother to baby - but only if you know your status.
- There is a time gap between potential infection and when a test will give an accurate result. This varies according to the type of test, so check with your healthcare professional.

You can test for [HIV](#) at any time. If you think you have put yourself at risk, then speak with a healthcare professional immediately. Even if you think that you have not put yourself at risk, testing regularly for HIV is still an important part of good sexual health.

## Making HIV testing routine

Testing at least once a year for HIV and other [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) is good sexual health practice for everyone who is sexually active, even if you know you haven't put yourself at risk of infection. Depending on how many different sexual partners you have in any one year, you might want to consider testing more regularly.

By doing this regularly, you can help keep your mind at rest, and any surprises that do arise can be dealt with quickly.

## I've taken a risk, how long should I wait to get a test for HIV?

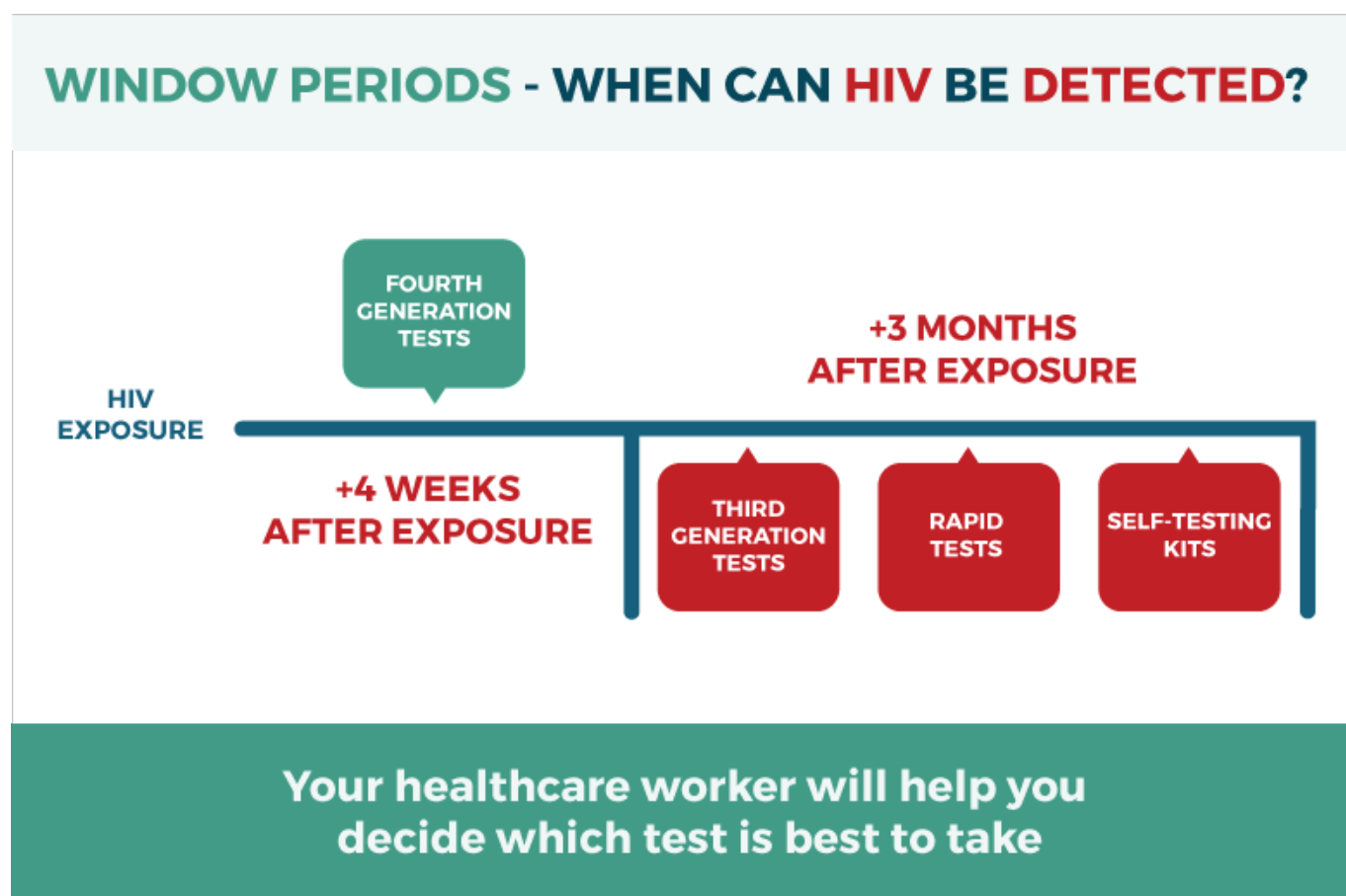
If you have had [unprotected sex](#), [shared injecting equipment](#) or think that infected blood has got into your body, then you should talk to your doctor or a healthcare professional as soon as possible. They will be able to talk to you about your situation and risk, and decide on the best course of action.

If you visit a health professional within 72 hours of suspected infection, you may be offered PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) to prevent infection. This is a course of [emergency HIV treatment](#) that will reduce your chance of being infected with HIV. Doctors will only give you this if they feel you are at a high risk of HIV. You'll be asked to come in for testing at a later date.

If you've missed the window to take emergency HIV prevention, then most modern HIV tests are now able to detect HIV from around four weeks after exposure. Depending on the [type of test](#) you are offered and when your risk was, your doctor may ask you to come back for further tests and a follow-up before a true result can be given.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV, it is in this early stage of infection that you are most infectious to others. Be sure to be extra careful during this period – always use [condoms](#) and never share injecting equipment.

## A word about window periods...



The window period refers to the time it takes for HIV to show up in a specific HIV test. The length of the window period will depend on the [type of test](#) you take.

If you feel like you may be at risk of HIV, do not wait, speak to a healthcare professional as soon as possible. The most important thing is to test. If you have tested negative but think you may have been exposed to HIV recently, you can take another test once the window period passes.

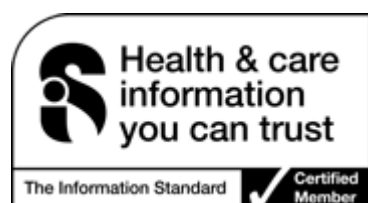
## I'm pregnant, when should I test?

Testing for HIV during your pregnancy is very important and is now done routinely as part of antenatal care in most countries. Your doctor will tell you everything you need to know about HIV testing alongside the other blood tests they do during pregnancy and you will usually be tested at your first appointment.

If you find out you are positive, you will be given [treatment](#) to prevent the onward transmission of HIV to your unborn child, and you will be expected to continue to have a healthy pregnancy. The earlier you start treatment, the greater chance your child will be born HIV-negative. Check out our section on [Pregnancy, childbirth & breastfeeding](#) for more information.

Read on to find out: [What's involved in HIV tests?](#)

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### Sources:

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[THT \(2014\) 'Testing for HIV' \[Accessed June 6th, 2015\]](#)

[BHIVA \(2008\) 'UK National Guidelines for HIV Testing 2008'](#)

[BASHH/EAGA \(2014\) 'Position Statement on HIV Window Period'](#)

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