Why get tested for HIV?

FAST FACTS

- 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.

The only way to tell if you have HIV is to get tested. A lot of people feel nervous about it, but the reasons to test far outweigh the reasons not to test!

Do I need to get tested for HIV?

You should get tested if you:

- have had unprotected sex
- have recently been diagnosed with another STI
- have shared needles or other injecting equipment
- are worried about HIV and want to put your mind at ease.

For more information on how HIV is passed on, read this page.

Even if you think it’s unlikely that you will have HIV, the quickest way to stop worrying is by taking a test.
If you’re sexually active, it’s good to get into the habit of testing regularly for HIV, even if you regularly use condoms and don’t think you have been at risk.

**It’s always better to know**

Testing is the only way to know if you have HIV. It’s normal to feel worried about HIV, but testing for HIV can put your mind at ease and reduce the anxiety of not knowing.

People often put off testing because they are worried about the result, but knowing your status will allow you to take control of your health.

If you’re negative, you can get more information on how to stay that way, while if you’re positive you can start treatment, to make sure that you stay healthy.

**It’s quick and easy**

Getting an HIV test is quick, easy and almost always free. It’s also the only way to know for sure whether or not you have HIV.

Depending on the type of test used, it will involve either a quick saliva or blood test, neither of which are painful. In some places you can even take a test in your own home.

An HIV test is done by taking blood from the finger or arm, or by an oral swab.

**A positive result means you can access treatment**

If you do have HIV, being diagnosed at an early stage helps you to live a long and healthy life. You can start HIV treatment (antiretroviral drugs) earlier, which will reduce the amount of HIV in your body and protect your immune system from damage.

With the right treatment and care, people living with HIV can expect to live as long as the average person, so it’s important to take control of your health by getting a test.
Testing means you can keep your sexual partners healthy

Testing for HIV regularly, and knowing your status, means that you can look after the sexual health of your partners too.

If you know you're positive, you can use protection, such as condoms, to prevent HIV from being transmitted.

Also, by starting and staying on antiretroviral treatment you will reduce the levels of HIV in your body, making it less likely you will pass HIV on. With effective antiretroviral treatment it’s possible for the level of virus in your body to fall so low that it becomes ‘undetectable’ – meaning HIV doesn’t show up in normal blood tests. If this is confirmed by your healthcare professional it means you can no longer pass on HIV through sex. However, you will need to keep having your viral load monitored to make sure that it remains ‘undetectable’.

No one will know your results unless you decide to tell them. But if you know you’re positive, you can encourage your partners to get tested too, which will help them protect their health.

Is HIV testing ever mandatory?

Because choosing to take an HIV test can be hugely beneficial for yourself and your loved ones, the decision to test should be yours alone to make.

However, some countries require you to get an HIV test in order to enter the country. For further information about countries that have travel restriction, see the Global Database on HIV travel.

In addition, some insurance companies and employers such as the armed forces may require you to test for HIV. You should always seek advice from a healthcare professional first if you are unsure.

Avert does not support mandatory testing for HIV. HIV testing should be given with full consent and proper support to yourself, unless in the case of blood donor screening and organ donation.
REMEmBER, HIV TESTING SHOULD...

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

Read on to find out: When to get tested?

HELP US HELP OTHERS

Avert.org is helping to prevent the spread of HIV and improve sexual health by giving people trusted, up-to-date information.

We provide all this for FREE, but it takes time and money to keep Avert.org going.

Can you support us and protect our future?

Every contribution helps, no matter how small.

PLEASE DONATE NOW

Photo by Jon Rawlinson/ CC BY 2.0

Last full review:
31 January 2019
Next full review:
31 January 2022

Sources: