

When to get tested for HIV?



FAST FACTS

- If you think you might have been exposed to HIV, it's best to speak to a healthcare professional immediately.
- Even if you don't think you have been at risk, testing regularly is good practice for people who are having sex.
- It's important to test for HIV during pregnancy. If you know your status, you can avoid passing the virus on to your baby.
- A 'window period' is the amount of time it takes after infection for a test to give you an accurate result. It's good to know about window periods, but don't delay getting tested if you think you might have been exposed to HIV.

Making HIV testing routine

It's recommended that you test for [HIV](#) and other [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) at least once a year if you're having sex, even if you always use protection.

You might want to test more regularly than this, for example, if you are having sex with a new partner or feel you are more at risk. Groups who are more at risk are recommended to test more regularly. Testing every 3-6 months is often advised for men who have sex with men.

Testing regularly helps keep your mind at rest, and if you test positive, it means you can start

[treatment](#) quickly, protecting your health.

Should I wait to test for HIV?

If you have had [unprotected sex](#), shared [injecting equipment](#) or think that you have been at risk some other way, 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 help you decide what to do next. If you visit a healthcare professional within 72 hours of when you think you were exposed to HIV, you may be offered [PEP \(post-exposure prophylaxis\)](#). This is a course of emergency HIV treatment that can prevent HIV infection. It must be started within 72 hours and be taken properly.

Unfortunately, PEP isn't always available and healthcare providers may only give it to you if they feel you're at a high risk of HIV. If you take PEP you'll need to test before and after to ensure it has worked.

If the time to take PEP has passed, 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 to check your results.

If you think you have been exposed to HIV, it is in this early stage of infection that you are most likely to pass HIV on to others. Be extra careful during this time – use condoms and don't share injecting equipment.

A word about window periods...

The window period refers to the time it takes for HIV to show up in an HIV test. The length of the window period will depend on the type of test you take.

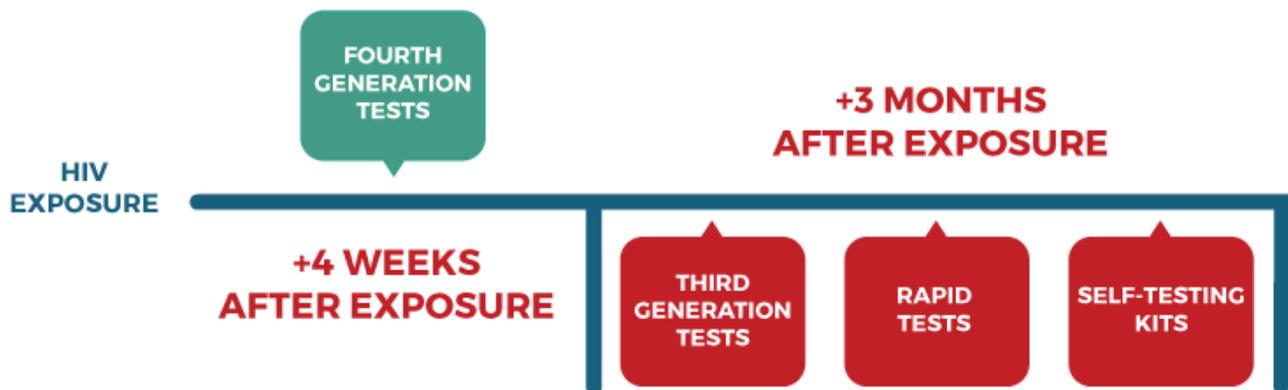
If you feel like you may be at risk of HIV, do not wait, speak to a healthcare professional as soon as possible. The most important thing is to test.

If you test negative but think you may have been exposed to HIV more recently, you can take another test once the window period has passed.

The picture below shows the window periods for [different HIV tests](#). Some tests (fourth generation tests) can give you an accurate result within four weeks, while others can take three months to be accurate (third generation tests, rapid tests and self-testing kits).

A healthcare worker will be able to explain how long the window period is for the test you are taking, and will tell you if they think you'll need to test for HIV again.

WINDOW PERIODS - WHEN CAN HIV BE DETECTED?



Your healthcare worker will help you decide which test is best to take

I'm pregnant, when should I test?

Testing for HIV during your pregnancy is very important. Left undiagnosed and untreated women living with HIV can pass the virus on to their unborn babies. In most countries, HIV tests are a routine part of the care women receive during pregnancy (their antenatal care). Partners of pregnant women should also get tested during this time.

The earlier you test in your pregnancy the better. You'll usually be tested in your first appointment, ideally before your tenth week. These tests should be repeated, either every three months or at least once again in your third trimester.

Your doctor will tell you everything you need to know about HIV testing alongside the other blood tests they do during pregnancy.

If you find out you are positive, you'll be given [treatment](#) to prevent passing HIV on to your child. The earlier you start treatment, the greater the 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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Next full review:

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Sources:

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