

# HIV: Getting Tested



HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is most commonly passed through unprotected sex (sex without using a condom) or by sharing needles. An HIV test tells if you have been infected with HIV. Taking an HIV test means you are taking control of your health. Here is what you need to know about getting tested.

## Who should get tested?

- ✓ Most people should be tested at least once as part of their routine health care. Some people should be tested more often.
- ✓ Get an HIV test if:
  - You have had vaginal, anal or oral sex without using a condom or latex barrier.
  - You have shared needles, syringes or other equipment for drugs, steroids, vitamins, hormones, tattoos or body piercing.
  - You have ever had another sexually transmitted infection.
  - You have ever had hepatitis or tuberculosis.
  - You have had unprotected sex with someone you know has HIV.
  - You have had unprotected sex with someone who has done any of the above things.
- ✓ If you are planning to have a baby or are pregnant, get tested.
- ✓ If you have been sexually assaulted, get tested.

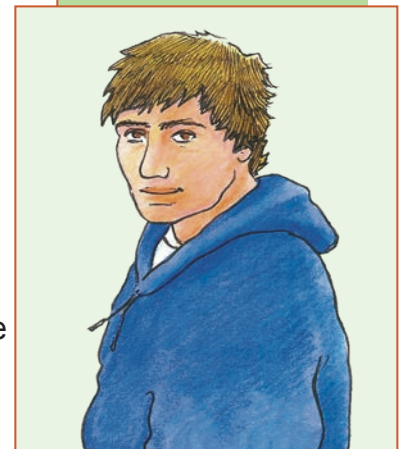


## Where can I get tested?

- ✓ You can be tested for HIV through your local health department, family planning center, doctor's office, health care clinic, or at a public testing site.
- ✓ Many of these places offer free or low-cost testing. If you have health insurance, HIV testing is always free.
- ✓ Getting tested at a place that also provides counseling can help you learn about HIV prevention and what your results mean.

## What about home tests?

- ✓ Home test kits can be purchased at drugstores and on the Internet.
- ✓ Use an FDA-approved home test kit. Others may not be accurate.
- ✓ If you test positive with a home test get a follow-up test to make sure it is an accurate result.
- ✓ Phone counseling is available from the makers of the test kits. They can link you to local healthcare providers.



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## I may have been exposed to HIV. When should I get tested?

- ✓ If you think you have been exposed to HIV, talk to a doctor right away. There is a medication called PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) that can help prevent infection if it is taken within 72 hours.
- ✓ There are no tests that can detect an HIV infection immediately.
- ✓ The time between possible exposure and when a test can find HIV in the body is called the window period. The window period varies from a few weeks to a few months depending on the person and the type of HIV test.
- ✓ Because there is a chance of a false-negative test result, get tested more than once after a potential HIV exposure. Talk to your doctor about when to take the second test.

## Will anyone else know the results of the test?

- ✓ All HIV testing is confidential, like other medical records. But doctors and other medical personnel will know the results. The results will also be reported to the state health department.
- ✓ Anonymous testing – where your name is not attached to the results – is available in some states and through home test kits.

## What happens if I test negative?

- ✓ A negative test result means HIV was not found in your body now.
- ✓ You will need to protect yourself and others by practicing safer sex and by not sharing needles.

## What if I test positive?

- ✓ A positive test means HIV was found in your body. Remember that people with HIV often remain healthy for years.
- ✓ If you are HIV positive:
  - See a healthcare provider right away, even if you feel healthy.
  - Find out about drug treatments that can help you stay healthy.
- ✓ Make sure you don't pass HIV to other people.

**If you have had unprotected sex or shared needles, you could become infected with HIV without knowing. The only way to know for sure is to take an HIV test. For more information or to find an HIV testing site, visit [gettested.cdc.gov](https://gettested.cdc.gov)**



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