

Call 311 for

More information about HIV/AIDS, including where to get a free confidential or anonymous HIV test.

Free testing and treatment for other sexually transmitted diseases.

Help notifying your contacts: ask for the Contact Notification Assistance Program (CNAP).

A list of syringe exchange programs.

Help for domestic violence, or call 1-800-621-HOPE (1-800-621-4673).

Help with substance abuse, depression, or mental health problems, or call 1-800-LIFENET (1-800-543-3638).

Information on discrimination from the New York City Commission on Human Rights.

Or visit nyc.gov/health.

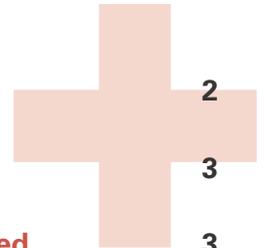


WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT AN HIV TEST



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1. Know Your HIV Status

Do you know *your* status? Everyone should!

Many New Yorkers – more than 100,000 – are living with HIV. *But as many as 1 in 4 don't know it.*

Man or woman, gay or straight, anyone who has ever had sex without a condom, or ever injected steroids or other drugs to get high (even if only once) should be tested for HIV.

Negative or positive, it's important to know. If you test negative, you can learn how to stay that way.

If you test positive:

You can protect yourself.

There is still no cure for HIV/AIDS, and AIDS is still a life-threatening disease. *But good medical care and new medicines are helping people live healthier and longer, even though they are infected with HIV.*

The sooner you know you're positive, the better – because once you know, you'll be able to get care.

You can protect others.

If you're HIV-positive, you may have exposed others. *They deserve to know, so they can be tested, too.*

You can also take steps to make sure you don't infect others in the future (*see sections 5 and 7*).

You can protect your baby.

A pregnant woman who knows she is HIV-positive can save her baby's life. Without medication, a mother can pass HIV to her baby.

But if you have HIV and get medication, you can improve your own health and *almost always keep your baby from becoming infected with HIV.*

2. Anyone Can Get an HIV Test

The HIV test is voluntary, free at public clinics, and strictly confidential:

Voluntary.

Getting tested to protect your health and the health of others is a smart thing to do – and it's *your* choice. You can withdraw your consent at any time.

Anyone can get an HIV test, regardless of health insurance or immigration status. Generally, you do NOT need a parent's permission to get tested, even if you're under 18.



Free at public clinics.

You do not have to pay for an HIV test. Free tests are available at Health Department clinics. Call 311 for information.

Strictly confidential.

From the minute you walk into a Health Department clinic or a doctor's office, your privacy is protected by law. The law applies equally to everyone, including people who are in jail or prison.

3. What to Expect When You're Tested

Counseling.



When you get an HIV test, a health care provider or a counselor will:

- Describe the test, how it's done, and what the results mean.
- Explain how to reduce risky behaviors and protect yourself and others against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (such as always using latex condoms and never sharing needles or "works").
- Answer any questions about HIV/AIDS.
- Ask you to sign a consent form.

Taking the HIV test.

There are different kinds of HIV tests. Some use a blood sample, some use a mouth swab, and some use urine. When a test finds HIV antibodies, it means you are probably infected with HIV and are HIV-positive. All positive tests require a second test to confirm the results.

Getting your results.

How soon you get your test results depends on what kind of test you take:

Rapid HIV tests give results in less than an hour. Many doctors and clinics (including Health Department clinics) use rapid HIV tests.

- When a rapid test is used, you get your results in the same visit.
- **If your results are negative**, it means that you were not infected with HIV *as of 3 months before* you took the test. (HIV tests are not fully reliable until 3 months have passed since the last exposure to HIV – see Section 4.)
- **If your results are positive (“preliminary positive”)**, it means you are almost certainly infected with HIV. A second test is necessary, however, to confirm a positive result.

Other HIV tests are available that require a person to wait a week or two, then return to get the results.

4. If Your Test Results Are Negative

All HIV screening tests look for HIV antibodies. A *negative* result means the test you took did NOT find HIV antibodies.

Even if you test negative, you could still have HIV if you were exposed during the 3-month period before you took the test. This is called the “*window period*”.

- It takes some time after a person is infected to make antibodies to HIV. If you were infected with HIV *up to 3 months* before you were tested, there may not be enough antibodies in your system yet to show up on the test.
- If it is possible you were exposed to HIV in this 3-month window period (by having unprotected sex, for example), your provider will ask you to come back for another test in 3 to 6 months.



- It is very important NOT to engage in any risky behavior before you take another test, so you don't put yourself and others at risk for HIV, and so you don't end up in another window period.

If during the 3-month window period before you were tested you did not engage in activities that could spread HIV, then a negative result means that you did not have HIV when you were tested.

Your counselor will help you understand what your results mean for you.

Stay safe! A negative test result does NOT protect you against HIV! So, negative or positive – *always* use condoms, and *never* share needles or “works.” Protect yourself and others (see Section 7).

5. If Your Test Results Are Positive

It's hard to be told you're HIV-positive. There's a lot to think about and a lot of feelings to handle.



If you're positive, it's better to know than not to know – much better!

First, give yourself a lot of credit for getting tested. You did a hard thing, and you did the right thing, to protect yourself and the people you love. Now that you know you're positive, you can get the care you need.

You don't have to go it alone. It is important for everyone with HIV to get as much help as they can.

Your counselor will help you find a good doctor. With good medical treatment and self-care, people can be healthy even with HIV.

Your counselor will also:

- **Help you get free or low-cost** health insurance or medical treatment. You can get good medical care whether you have insurance or not! (Call 311 for more information – ask for the AIDS Hotline.)
- **Help you get prenatal care** if you are pregnant. Taking certain medicines can improve your health and greatly reduce the chance that your baby will have HIV.
- **Help you reduce risky behaviors** by having safer sex and practicing safer needle use.

- **Help you get confidential services** for substance abuse, domestic violence, or depression or other mental health problems.
- **Help you get housing services** if you need it.
- **Without using your name, help notify your at-risk partners** of their possible exposure to HIV and encourage them to be tested to learn their own HIV status.

Take care of yourself.

When you know you're positive, there's a lot you can do to take care of yourself and others.

- **Get good medical care** to keep yourself healthy.
- **If you need help** for a problem with alcohol or other drugs, talk to your counselor or call LIFENET (*see the back cover*).
- **Make sure your partners are told** they were exposed to HIV, so they can get tested, too. (*You don't have to do it yourself – see the next page.*)
- **Tell anyone you are thinking of having sex with** that you're HIV-positive *before* you have sex (*even if they don't ask!*).
- **Never have unprotected sex.** Even if you're on anti-HIV medications and even if your viral load is not detectable, you can still transmit HIV. *Using a condom can:*
 - Protect you from becoming infected with other STDs or different strains of HIV that may be worse or resistant to drug treatment.
 - Prevent you from infecting anyone else.

Discrimination is against the law.

All positive HIV tests are reported to the Health Department. We use the information to understand the epidemic better, and to get money for programs to prevent and treat HIV/ AIDS. As required by law, all reports are strictly confidential.

Your HIV status cannot be used to discriminate against you. If you believe a landlord, employer, or health or service provider has discriminated against you, call the New York City Commission on Human Rights at 311.

6. Make Sure Your Contacts Are Notified

Why it's so important.

If you're HIV-positive, you may have exposed others.



They deserve to know, so they can be tested for HIV, too.

- If your sex or drug partners are HIV-positive but don't know, they can easily spread it to others.
- When people don't know they have HIV, they can't get the treatment they need. Without good medical care, people with HIV are much more likely to get sick and die sooner.
- **If your partners are notified and tested,** they can get the care they need.

You don't have to do it yourself.

- **If you want to, you can tell your own partners.** Tell anyone you have had sex with that they may have been exposed to HIV. Do it directly and clearly. Your doctor or counselor can help you find the words. Known contacts will be reported to the Health Department to make sure they are tested.
- **If you prefer, the Health Department can notify your contacts.**
 - The Health Department will notify your contacts *without ever using your name or revealing your identity.*
 - Our counselors are experts, and they are required by law to protect your identity. Your contacts will be told only that they may have been exposed to HIV. They will *not* be told who exposed them. Nor will they be told when, where, or how they were exposed, or even if you are a man or a woman.
- **For help to notify contacts, you, your doctor, or your counselor can call 311. Ask for the Contact Notification Assistance Program (CNAP).**

7. Protect Yourself and Others!

The only way to completely avoid HIV is by not having sex and not sharing needles and “works”.

If you are sexually active.

You can reduce your risk of getting or spreading HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) by having sex *only* in a mutually monogamous relationship with a partner you are sure is not infected.

If you are having sex *outside* of such a relationship, you can reduce your risk by:

- **Never having anal sex without a condom.** Unprotected anal sex is the greatest sexual risk for spreading HIV.
- **Limiting the number of people you have sex with.** The more partners you have, the greater your risk.
- **Always using a latex condom** whenever you have sex – vaginal, anal, or oral. Condoms made of “natural” materials, such as lambskin, protect against pregnancy but NOT against HIV and other STDs. If you are allergic to latex, you can use condoms (including female condoms) made of polyurethane or other synthetic materials.
- **Avoiding alcohol and drugs when you have sex.** Drinking or getting high makes it much harder to practice safer sex (such as remembering to use condoms). For help with a substance abuse problem, talk to your counselor or call LIFENET (*see the back cover*).
- **Getting tested and treated** for sexually transmitted diseases. Many STDs (including syphilis) make it easier to get and spread HIV.



8. More Information About HIV/AIDS

HIV is the human immunodeficiency virus. It is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

- **You can't tell who has HIV** by looking at them, or by whether a person is sick or healthy. Many people are infected with HIV for 10 years or more before showing any signs of illness. That is why the only way to know if you are infected is to get an HIV test.
- **HIV weakens the body's immune system** and makes it harder to fight infections. As a result, people with AIDS can get serious infections and cancers. These illnesses can make them very sick and can eventually kill them.
- **By getting good medical care**, people can stay healthier and live longer, even if they have HIV.



How HIV is spread.

HIV is spread through contact with the blood, semen, or vaginal fluids of HIV-infected people.

- **It can be spread by injecting drugs.** Sharing needles or “works” is extremely risky.
- **It can be spread through vaginal, anal, or oral sex.** Any unprotected sex (sex without a condom) can transmit HIV. Unprotected anal sex is the most dangerous.
- **A woman can transmit HIV to her baby** during pregnancy or delivery. (*But if she takes medication, she can almost always prevent her baby from becoming infected with HIV.*)
- **HIV can also be spread through breast milk.** (So women who are HIV-positive should not breast-feed.)

Before there was a test, HIV was sometimes spread through blood transfusions. Today, the blood supply is extremely safe.

HIV is NOT spread through everyday activities.

HIV is not spread through casual contact. It is not spread through sweat, tears, saliva, or a casual kiss from an infected person. You can't get HIV from touching objects used by or sharing food with people with HIV. People cannot become infected through mosquito or other insect bites.