

Understanding Your HIV Test Results: What They Mean to You



HIV SCREENING. STANDARD CARE.™

What Should I Expect?

Knowing your HIV status gives you powerful information to help you take steps to keep you and your partner healthy. If your results are negative, it means you do not have HIV, unless you were exposed very recently.

If your results are positive, it means you most likely have HIV. However, even after a positive result, the good news is that you can be treated. With treatment, people with HIV usually live healthy lives.

If you recently had an HIV test, or are considering getting an HIV test, here is some information you may find helpful.

Understanding Your Negative HIV Test Result

What If My Test Result Is Negative?

Great news! However, you aren't finished quite yet. There are still a couple things to do.



- Ask your health care provider if you need a follow-up test. Even if your test results are negative, there may still be a very small chance that you have HIV.



- Keep protecting yourself. A negative test does not mean that you can't get HIV, or that your sexual partner does not have HIV.



- Call your health care provider right away if you feel sick or have common HIV symptoms, such as:
 - Flu-like symptoms
 - Swollen lymph nodes (swelling in the neck, groin, or armpit)
 - Extreme tiredness
 - Rash
 - Sores in your mouth

If my test is negative, why would I need another test?

- After exposure to HIV, it takes time for enough HIV to grow inside of you for a test to be able to detect it; this is called the "window period."
- This "window period" between exposure and being able to find out if you have an infection is also present with other conditions.
- Depending on the type of HIV test and when it was given, you may need another test to be sure that you were not in the window period during the first test.

Behaviors That Can Put You at Risk

Even after a negative test, you need to know whether you are putting yourself at risk for HIV. Several activities may increase your risk of HIV, including:

- Anal or vaginal sex without a condom or without protection of medicines to prevent or treat HIV
- Multiple sex partners
- Sex with people you do not know
- Sex while taking drugs or drinking alcohol (which may increase sexual risk taking)

Get tested *at least* once a year if any of these statements is true:

- You are a sexually active gay or bisexual man (testing every 3 to 6 months may be a good idea)
- You have sex with people without knowing their sexual history or whether they have HIV
- You have sex with multiple partners
- You share syringes or other tools (e.g., water, cotton) to inject drugs
- You have another sexually transmitted disease, hepatitis, or tuberculosis
- You have sex with someone who has HIV
- You have sex with someone who does anything listed above

You can assess your own risk for HIV using the CDC's simple, interactive HIV Risk Reduction Tool, available at:

<https://wwwn.cdc.gov/hivrisk/>



Protect Yourself and Stay Healthy

You should continue to take care of yourself, even if you do not have HIV.



- See your health care provider regularly.
 - Discuss your HIV risk behaviors honestly with your health care provider.
 - Your health care provider can provide information on steps you can take to lower your risk of getting HIV, and direct you to HIV prevention counseling services.





- You can take the following steps to help protect yourself from getting HIV:
 - Limit your number of sexual partners
 - Use condoms the right way every time you have sex
 - If you inject drugs, the best way to protect yourself is to stop injecting drugs. But if you continue to inject drugs, use new, sterile needles and other tools every time, and never share them.
 - **To learn more about lowering your risk of getting HIV if you inject drugs, visit**
www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/risk/cdc-hiv-injection-drug-use.pdf.



- Call your health care provider immediately if you think you may have been exposed to HIV, and ask him/her about medicine that may help prevent HIV infection (called "post-exposure prophylaxis," or PEP).



- If you continue to engage in high-risk behaviors, ask your health care provider about medicine that may reduce your risk of getting HIV if you are exposed (called "pre-exposure prophylaxis," or PrEP).



- If your partner is HIV positive, encourage him or her to stay on treatment. People with HIV who take their medicine as prescribed and maintain an undetectable viral load have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to their HIV-negative sexual partners.



- If you are sexually active, get tested for other STDs, and have your partner get tested, too. Having another STD increases the chances of getting or transmitting HIV.

Understanding Your Positive HIV Test Result:

What to Expect and Next Steps

What If My Test Result Is Positive?

This isn't the result you wanted, and you may feel overwhelmed and worried, but don't panic.

There are good treatments available that:



- Reduce the amount of HIV in your blood
- Help prevent AIDS — the most advanced stage of HIV — and other HIV-related illnesses
- Dramatically reduce the risk of transmitting HIV
 - In fact, if your viral load becomes undetectable, you have effectively no risk of transmitting to sexual partners.

Patients who begin treatment soon after a positive HIV test can remain healthy for many years.

- The first step after testing positive is to see your health care provider, even if you don't feel sick.
- A follow-up test may be done, just to be sure the first test was correct.
 - If the second test is also positive, it means you have HIV.
 - Remember that a positive test does not mean you have AIDS or that you will get AIDS.
- **To learn more about the different types of HIV tests, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/testing.html>**

You Are Not Alone

- The **CDC's HIV Treatment Works (HTW)** campaign shares inspiring stories of people like you who are living successfully with HIV throughout the United States.
- The **HTW** website provides information about how sticking with treatment can help you live a longer, healthier life.
- Visit the **HTW** website at:
www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/hivtreatmentworks/index.html.

Will other people know my test result?

HIV tests may be “anonymous” or “confidential,” depending on the reporting requirements in the state where you are tested.

- If you take an anonymous test, that means your name will not appear on the test results and only you will see them.
- If you take a confidential test, it means your test results will go in your medical record like any other medical test results (blood pressure, cholesterol), and may be shared with your primary health care provider and health insurance company.
 - Otherwise, your HIV test results are protected by the same privacy laws that protect the rest of your health information.
 - In other words, your information remains private and confidential.

Talk to Your Partner(s) About Your Diagnosis

You should tell any sex partners and anyone with whom you share needles that you have HIV, even if you're uncomfortable talking about it.

- Communicating with each other about your HIV test results means you can take steps to protect both of you.

How Do I Find a Clinician for HIV Care?

- Once you know you have HIV, the most important thing to do is get the right care immediately.
- Your health care provider is an important part of successful HIV treatment. He/she:
 - Prescribes medicines to treat HIV and other conditions
 - Orders tests to keep track of your health
 - Answers any questions you have about your health
 - Directs you to other caregivers and services you may need
- Your health care provider may choose to treat you, or he/she may refer you to another health care provider who specializes in treating HIV.
- Several organizations can help you find HIV clinicians and services near you.



The Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program helps people with HIV who have nowhere else to turn for health care. You can search for low-cost medical care even if you don't have health insurance.



The American Academy of HIV Medicine website allows users to search for medical providers by specialty and by type of payment accepted.

- HIV.gov locator: <https://locator.hiv.gov/>

How Can HIV Harm Me and How Is It Treated?

HIV damages the body's ability to fight infections.

- HIV destroys CD4 cells, which are important infection-fighting cells in the body.
- HIV medicine — called antiretroviral therapy (ART) — prevents HIV from multiplying in the body.
- During successful HIV treatment, the amount of HIV in the body (called the “viral load”) is so low that it cannot be detected, which means there isn’t enough HIV to kill CD4 cells, and you remain able to fight infection and stay healthy.

ART is recommended for all people with HIV, no matter how long they’ve had the virus or how healthy they are.

- You should begin ART treatment as soon as you are diagnosed with HIV, before the virus has a chance to kill CD4 cells.

HIV medicine can help you stay healthy for many years. In fact, if you get and keep an undetectable viral load by taking HIV medicine as prescribed, you have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to sex partners.

Your health care provider will help decide what HIV medicines you should take based on how well your CD4 cells are working and how fast HIV is growing in your body. Your health care provider will also assess your overall health and whether you have other diseases that need to be treated along with HIV.

For more information on HIV therapies, visit the CDC’s Act Against AIDS website: www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/hivtreatmentworks/stayincare/treatment.html.

Additional Resources

CDC-INFO

1-800-232-4636; TTY:888-232-6348 English,
en Español

To find an HIV testing site, text ZIP code to KNOWIT
(566948)

**For Additional Information About HIV,
HIV Testing, and HIV Prevention, Visit:**

www.cdc.gov/hiv

**To Learn More About HIV Testing and
Prevention, and to Find Free, Fast, and
Confidential HIV Testing Near You, Visit:**

DOING IT, Testing for HIV. [www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/
campaigns/doingit/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/doingit/index.html)

**To Learn More About Safe Sex, PrEP, and HIV
Testing for Men Who Have Sex With Men, Visit:**

Start Talking. Stop HIV. [www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/
campaigns/starttalking/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/starttalking/index.html) or [https://www.cdc.
gov/hiv/risk/prep/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/prep/index.html)

**To Learn the Basics About PEP and If It's Right for
You, Visit:** www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/pep.html

**To Learn more about HIV and Access Services for
People at Risk or Living With HIV, Visit:** HIV.gov.
www.hiv.gov

**For Information on When to Start HIV Treatment
and a List of All FDA-Approved HIV Medications,
Visit:** AIDSinfo. www.aidsinfo.nih.gov

More Information:

www.cdc.gov/hiv
or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)



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