

Pre-Test Information HIV Fact Sheet

What is HIV?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus is a virus that attacks your body's immune system, killing off your CD4 cells. These cells help your body fight off infection, illness, and disease.

What is AIDS?

Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome is a disease you get when HIV destroys your body's immune system. Normally, your immune system helps you fight off illness. When your immune system fails you can become very sick and can die.

You can get HIV:

- By having unprotected sex (sex without a condom) with someone who has HIV. The virus can be in an infected person's blood, semen, or vaginal secretions and can enter your body through tiny cuts or sores in your skin, or through the lining of your vagina, penis, rectum, or mouth.
- By sharing a needle and syringe to inject drugs or sharing drug equipment used to prepare drugs for injection with someone who has HIV.
- By sustaining an occupational exposure such as a needlestick or body fluid splash from an infected individual.
- From a blood transfusion or blood clotting factor that you got before 1985. (But today it is unlikely you could get infected that way because all blood in the United States has been tested for HIV since 1985.)
- Babies born to women with HIV also can become infected during pregnancy, birth, or breast-feeding.

You cannot get HIV:

- By working with or being around someone who has HIV.
- From sweat, spit, tears, clothes, drinking fountains, phones, toilet seats, or through everyday things like sharing a meal.
- From insect bites or stings.
- From donating blood.
- From a closed-mouth kiss (but there is a very small chance of getting it from open-mouthed with an infected person because of possible blood contact).

Please continue on back.

How do I know if I have HIV?

You might have HIV and still feel perfectly healthy. The only way to know for sure if you are infected is to be tested. You cannot rely on symptoms to know whether or not you are infected with HIV. Many people who are infected with HIV do not have any symptoms for many years. Your health care provider can give you an HIV test. The tests commonly used to detect HIV infection look for antibodies produced by an individual's immune system when they are exposed to HIV. Ninety seven percent (97%) of people will develop antibodies in the first three months following the time of their exposure. In very rare cases, it can take up to six months to develop antibodies to HIV.

HIV testing can be done through a blood draw or oral swab. Conventional tests results that are negative can be available in a few days. Positive test results must be sent to an independent laboratory and can take up to two weeks for confirmation. Rapid tests can be done on site and the results can be provided to you in approximately 30 minutes. It is important to note that rapid testing can only tell you if you are likely positive; confirmation still needs to occur in an independent laboratory.

Why should I get HIV tested?

People who are infected with HIV but not aware of it are not able to take advantage of the therapies that can keep them healthy and extend their lives, nor do they have the knowledge to protect their sex or drug-use partners from becoming infected. Knowing whether one is positive or negative for HIV confers great benefits in health decision making.¹

After Your HIV Test

Talk to any partner about your results. Ask the person if he/she has been tested and what his/her results are. This will help you to make future decisions. If a partner hasn't been tested, ask him/her to take an HIV test.

Preventing HIV

- Abstinence (not having sex) is the most effective way to prevent HIV.

But if you are going to have sex:

- Monogamy means that you and your partner are only having sex with each other and no one else.
 - Have you discussed this with your partner?
 - Do you have sex with people outside of your relationship?
 - Does your partner? Are you sure about that?
Did you ask?
- Use Condoms. Condoms with the spermicide nonoxynol-9 are not recommended for HIV prevention.
- Don't share razors or toothbrushes since they may have traces of blood from another person on them.
- Avoid Drugs and Alcohol
 - Getting high (even one drink) changes the way you make decisions. This means you are not in control!
Sharing needles or exchanging sex for drugs or any other reason puts you at risk for HIV.

Literature References:

1. Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention, www.cdc.gov/HIV
2. Revised Recommendations for HIV Testing of Adults, Adolescents, and Pregnant Women in Health Care Settings, MMWR September 22, 2006, Vol. 55, No. RR-14
3. Pennsylvania Confidentiality of HIV-Related Information Act – Act 148/Act 59