

HIV

Counseling & testing



Should you be tested?

Why is HIV testing important?

The only way to tell if you've been infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS, is to be tested. While there is no cure for HIV, early medical attention and treatment can slow the effects of the virus and enable you to stay healthier longer.

What is an HIV antibody test?

It is a blood or oral test that can determine whether antibodies to HIV are present in a person's body. Antibodies are produced after infection with HIV. There is no test for AIDS.

Should I be tested? When?

You should consider taking an HIV antibody test if you —

- ▶ are a man who has had sex with other men;
- ▶ have shared injection needles or equipment;
- ▶ have had sex with one or more partners whose sex and drug-using behaviors are unknown to you;
- ▶ have had sex with someone who is infected with HIV or who falls into one of the above groups; or
- ▶ you (or your partner) are pregnant or considering pregnancy. (Early treatment can help to protect babies of HIV-infected mothers from being born with HIV.)

Before 1985, some people were infected with HIV through blood transfusions or use of blood products. Since 1985, however, blood products have been screened for HIV, so infection through a blood transfusion is extremely rare.

The decision to take or not to take an HIV antibody test is a personal choice. That's why counseling is an important part of the Illinois Department of Public Health's testing program. Every person tested meets individually with a trained health professional.

Most people develop detectable antibodies within three months after infection. In rare cases, it can take up to six months. It is best to test around 90 days after a possible exposure.

How is HIV antibody testing done?

The HIV antibody test is done in three steps. After pre-test counseling, a blood or oral (from between the gum and cheek) sample is taken and sent to a laboratory for an enzyme immunoassay, or EIA, test (formerly called the ELISA test). If the results of the test are positive, a second EIA is done on the same sample. If the second EIA also is positive, an additional test, called the Western blot, is performed. Based on these findings, physicians and other medical specialists can find out if antibodies to HIV are present in the body. It is important to remember that none of these tests are foolproof. Whether positive or negative, the results must be discussed with a trained health care professional.

What kind of counseling is provided?

Individuals receive information on how HIV is spread and how it affects the body. The counseling helps them to determine whether they should be tested. Should a person test positive for HIV, he or she will be counseled about treatment options and about how to avoid spreading the virus. If the person's test is negative, a counselor will help him or her to develop a prevention plan that will reduce the risk of getting HIV.

Where can I get an HIV test?

Anonymous (without names) or confidential counseling and testing are available at many local health departments and community agencies, including some outreach testing sites. Call the Illinois Department of Public Health's AIDS/HIV & STD Hotline at 1-800-243-2437 or TTY (hearing impaired use only) 1-800-782-0423 to find a location near you. Or, contact your personal doctor to arrange for a test.

What does a negative test mean?

A negative result does NOT mean you are immune to HIV. This usually means you are not infected. However, if you engaged in behavior that could spread the virus within three months of having the test, antibodies may not be detectable and you should be retested.

A negative results does NOT mean you are immune to HIV. No one is immune to HIV. By taking steps now, you can protect yourself from HIV infection. Your counselor will help you to develop a prevention plan.

What does a positive test mean?

A positive test result means antibodies to HIV were found. This means you are infected with the virus and can pass HIV to others – even if you have no symptoms. You are infected for life. It is likely you will develop AIDS at some time. While there is no cure or vaccine for HIV, there are medications that can help people stay healthier longer. Prompt medical care can delay the onset of AIDS and prevent some life-threatening conditions. It is important that you see a doctor so your health can be evaluated.

Where can I get more information on HIV counseling and testing?

Talk with your doctor or local health department. You also can call the Illinois Department of Public Health's toll-free AIDS/HIV & STD Hotline at 1-800-243-2437 or TTY (hearing impaired use only) 1-800-782-0423. Trained counselors are available seven days a week (9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekends) to answer your questions and to provide information.

HIV cannot be spread by -

- Giving blood
- Toilet seats
- Hot tubs
- Working with or being around someone with HIV
- Hugging
- Coughs or sneezes
- Shaking hands
- Sweat or tears
- Mosquitoes
- Simple (closed-mouth) kissing
- Eating food prepared or handled by an HIV-infected person



"Should I take one of those tests?"

HIV/AIDS

Facts for Life

- ▶ AIDS is a disease caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus).
- ▶ Testing is the only sure way to know if you are infected with HIV.
- ▶ A person infected with HIV may have no symptoms but can still infect others.
- ▶ HIV is spread through unprotected sex with an infected person. Both men and women can spread HIV.
- ▶ To avoid HIV infection through sex, don't have sex, or have sex only with a partner who isn't infected and who only has sex with you.
- ▶ Using condoms correctly every time you have sex reduces the risk of HIV infection.
- ▶ HIV also is spread by sharing needles and injection equipment.
- ▶ An infected woman can pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.
- ▶ Donating blood is safe.
- ▶ HIV is not spread by hugs, handshakes or kisses.
- ▶ HIV is not spread by mosquitoes.
- ▶ There is no cure or vaccine for HIV. However, current treatments can keep you healthier longer.



AIDS/HIV & STD

1.800.243.2437

H O T L I N E

Illinois Department of Public Health