

7 Key Facts to Know Before Getting an HIV Test

Your health care provider is required to offer HIV testing to all persons between the ages of 13 and 64, regardless of apparent risk. You are strongly encouraged to accept testing; it may provide you with important information about your health and staying healthy.

These are important points to know about HIV testing:

- ✓ HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It can be spread through unprotected sex (vaginal, anal, or oral sex) with someone who has HIV; contact with HIV-infected blood by sharing needles (piercing, tattooing, drug equipment, including needles); by HIV-infected pregnant women to their infants during pregnancy or delivery, or by breast feeding.
- ✓ There are treatments for HIV/AIDS that can help a person stay healthy.
- ✓ People with HIV/AIDS can use safe practices to protect others from becoming infected. Safe practices also protect people with HIV/AIDS from being infected with different strains of HIV.
- ✓ Testing is voluntary and can be done without giving your name at a public testing center (anonymous testing).
- ✓ By law, HIV test results and other related information are kept confidential (private).
- ✓ Discrimination based on a person's HIV status is illegal. People who are discriminated against can get help.
- ✓ Consent for HIV-related testing remains in effect until it is withdrawn verbally or in writing. If the consent was given for a specific period of time, the consent applies to that time period only. Persons may withdraw their consent at any time.

HIV testing is especially important for pregnant women.

- ✓ An infected mother can pass HIV to her child during pregnancy, child birth, or through breastfeeding.
- ✓ It is much better to know your HIV status before or early in pregnancy so you can make important decisions about your own health and the health of your baby.
- ✓ If you are pregnant and have HIV, treatment is available for your own health and to prevent passing HIV to your baby. If you have HIV and do not get treatment, the chance of passing HIV to your baby is one in four. If you get treatment, your chance of passing HIV to your baby is much lower.
- ✓ If you are not tested during pregnancy, your provider will recommend testing when you are in labor. In all cases, your baby will be tested after birth. A positive test on your baby means that you have HIV and your baby has been exposed to the virus.

If you test positive for HIV:

State law protects the confidentiality (privacy) of your test results. It also protects you from discrimination based on your HIV status.

- ✓ In almost all cases, you will be asked to give written approval before your HIV test result can be shared.
- ✓ Your HIV information can be released to health providers caring for you or your exposed child; to health officials when required by law; to insurers to permit payment; to persons involved in foster care or adoption; to official correctional, probation and parole staff; to emergency or health care staff who are accidentally exposed to your blood; or by special court order.
- ✓ The names of persons with HIV are reported to the State Health Department for tracking the epidemic and for planning services.
- ✓ The HIV Confidentiality Hotline at 1-800-962-5065 can answer your questions and help with confidentiality problems.
- ✓ The New York State Division of Human Rights at 1-800-523-2437 can help if you think you've been discriminated against based on your HIV status.

Your counselor/doctor will schedule, with your permission, a follow-up appointment with a medical care provider.

If you test positive for HIV, every effort will be made to link you directly to care, prevention, supportive, and partner services. Is it not enough to give you contact information for a Designated AIDS Center (DAC) or an HIV experienced provider. The healthcare professional who conducted the test must schedule, with your permission, a follow-up medical appointment for HIV care. The appointment is voluntary.

Your counselor/doctor will talk with you about notifying your sex partners or needle-sharing partners that they may have been exposed to HIV.

- ✓ Your partners need to know that they may have been exposed to HIV so they can be tested and get treated if they have HIV.
- ✓ If your health care provider knows the name of your spouse or other partner, he or she must report the name to the health department.
- ✓ Health department counselors (Partner Services Specialists) can help notify your partner(s) without ever telling them your name.
- ✓ To ensure your safety, the Partner Services Specialist or doctor will ask you questions about the risk of domestic violence for each partner to be notified.

- ✓ If there is any risk, the Partner Services Specialist or health care provider will not notify partners right away and will assist you in getting help.

If you test negative for HIV

If you received a negative HIV antibody test result, this almost always means you are not infected with HIV. However, you should understand what an HIV test result means and that you may need to be retested.

Why you may need to be retested for HIV

The period between the time of exposure to HIV and the time that a test can detect HIV infection is called the “window period.” During this period, an infected person has HIV and can pass it to other people, even if his or her HIV test is negative. If you engaged in any risk behaviors for HIV during the three months prior to your HIV test, you should be re-tested three months after your last possible exposure. Your provider will answer any questions you may have about re-testing.

You still have to protect yourself from HIV infection

Even though you tested negative for HIV, keep protecting yourself from HIV infection. Avoid having unprotected sex or sharing needles, syringes, or other drug injection equipment with anyone who has HIV or whose HIV status you don't know. Do not share needles for ear piercing, body piercing, or tattooing. You could get HIV if someone with HIV used the needle before you.

If you choose to have sex:

- ✓ Use a latex male condom or a female condom. Condoms work very well to prevent HIV if you use them the right way, every time you have sex.

If you choose to shoot drugs:

- ✓ Use new needles and equipment each time you shoot up.
- ✓ Do not share needles, syringes, or works.
- ✓ NEVER buy needles on the street, even if they look new.
- ✓ If you are 18 or older, you can buy new needles at many drugstores.
- ✓ Syringe exchange programs provide needles free of charge.

If you are drunk or high, you are less likely to think about protecting yourself and others from HIV. Using any drug lowers your ability to make decisions about safer sex and using clean needles and works.

Important phone numbers and web sites for HIV testing information

New York State Department of Health website:

www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/publications

New York State HIV/AIDS hotlines (toll-free)

English 1-800-541-AIDS, Spanish 1-800-233-SIDA, TDD 1-800-369-2437
Voice callers can use the New York Relay System 711 or 1-800-421-1220 and ask the operator to dial 1-800-541-2437

NYSDOH Anonymous HIV Counseling and Testing Program

For HIV information, referrals, or information on how to get a free, anonymous HIV test, call the Anonymous HIV Counseling and Testing Program.

Albany Region: 1-800-962-5065
Buffalo Region: 1-800-962-5064
Long Island Region (Suffolk/Nassau): 1-800-462-6786
Lower Hudson Valley Region: 1-800-828-0064
Rochester Region: 1-800-962-5063; TDD: 1-585-423-8120
Syracuse Region: 1-800-562-9423

New York City HIV/AIDS Hotline

1-800-TALK-HIV (825-5448)

National Centers for Disease Control STD hotlines

English/Spanish 1-800-232-4636, TTY 1-888-232-6348

New York State HIV/AIDS Counseling Hotline

1-800-872-2777

New York State PartNer Assistance Program: 1-800-541-AIDS

New York City Contact Notification Assistance Program: 1-212-693-1419

Confidentiality

New York State Confidentiality Hotline: 1-800-962-5065
Legal Action Center: 1-212-243-1313 or 1-800-223-4044

Human rights/discrimination

New York State Division of Human Rights: 1-800-523-2437
New York City Commission on Human Rights: 1-212-306-7500