

HIV ANTIBODY TEST

WHAT IS HIV?

(Human Immunodeficiency Virus) HIV is the virus, which causes AIDS. Over time it may reduce the body's ability to fight infection. By attacking key cells (known as CD4 cells) in your immune system. CD4 cells trigger your immune system to create antibodies in order to fight off infection.

WHAT IS AIDS?

(*Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*)

A person with HIV may, at some point, develop AIDS. Any one of a number of illnesses or infections may indicate that someone has AIDS.

A diagnosis of AIDS usually indicates that an individual has had HIV for a number of years.

HOW DOES SOMEONE BECOME INFECTED WITH HIV?

You can become infected if you have unprotected sex or share injecting equipment with someone who has the virus. This is because HIV lives in blood, semen, and vaginal secretions.

HIV is transmitted by:

- vaginal or anal sexual intercourse without a condom
- sharing drug injecting equipment
- during pregnancy, childbirth, or breast feeding if the mother is HIV positive

HIV is rarely transmitted by:

- vaginal or anal sex using condoms correctly (use of water based lubricant is also advised)
- oral sex without a condom (ejaculation increases the risk, as may gum disease)
- sharp injuries or splashes (e.g. needlestick injuries for health care workers)

HIV has never been reported as being transmitted by:

- kissing or cuddling
- shaking hands/social contact
- sharing knives and forks, cups or glasses
- toilet seats or mosquitoes

It can take up to 6 weeks for HIV antibodies to develop after a person has been infected (known as the '*Window Period*')

WHAT IS THE HIV ANTIBODY TEST?

It is a blood test, which detects HIV antibodies. Antibodies are produced by the body in response to an infection. If you are infected with HIV, then HIV antibodies will be present in your blood.

Having an HIV test is your choice. You will be able to talk about the test and the result with a health care worker. If you decide to have an HIV test, it is completely confidential.

You will be asked to return in about one weeks to collect your result.

WHAT DOES A NEGATIVE HIV ANTIBODY TEST RESULT MEAN?

It means either

- that a person has not been infected with HIV or
- that a person has been infected with HIV recently, but has not yet produced antibodies. Remember it can take up to 6 weeks for antibodies to develop after infection with HIV

WHAT DOES A POSITIVE HIV ANTIBODY TEST RESULT MEAN?

A positive test means that a person has been infected with HIV. All positive tests are confirmed by further testing.

What does an indeterminate HIV antibody test result mean?

Sometimes, although very rarely, a result is neither positive nor negative. This is an indeterminate result and more tests will be done. Please feel free to ask about this.

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on HIV Antibody Test. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.

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ARE THERE ADVANTAGES OR DISADVANTAGES OF HAVING AN HIV ANTIBODY TEST?

Some advantages are:

- modern treatments can increase the duration and quality of life of people living with HIV
- people who know they have HIV may be better able to make informed choices about future life plans
- knowledge of your HIV status may help you negotiate safe sex and/or injecting behaviour differently

Some disadvantages are:

- finding out about your HIV infection can be stressful and frightening
- some people may misuse a negative result to reassure themselves that risky contacts in the past have not put them in danger of becoming HIV positive

OTHER THINGS TO CONSIDER

- having an HIV antibody test is frequently stressful. Initial and ongoing support is available from this centre and other agencies
- all people thinking of being tested for HIV are invited to discuss any concerns with a counsellor, nurse or doctor
- talking about how you would manage a positive HIV result is often helpful
- any medical information or anything discussed at the centre is confidential. Testing for HIV is always done on coded (not named) specimens
- the Health Department receives statistics on the number of people with HIV or AIDS, but not names or addresses. Your details appear in coded form only

- there is a legal requirement for people infected with HIV to inform present and future sexual partners, if unprotected intercourse is anticipated

- sometimes people with HIV experience discrimination, e.g. in personal relationships, housing or employment

- life insurance and visas for some countries can be restricted for people infected with HIV

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