

HIV

TRANSMISSION

PREVENTION

TESTING



What is HIV? **HIV** (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that cause **AIDS** (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). HIV infection breaks down the body's immune system, making it more vulnerable to other infections. There is no cure for HIV or AIDS, but there are treatments available to help people live longer and healthier.

What can put me at risk for HIV? If someone else's **blood, semen, pre-cum, vaginal fluids** or **breast milk**, gets into your bloodstream through vaginal, anal or oral sex or an infected needle, you could be at risk. HIV is NOT transmitted by saliva, tears or sweat.

How do I protect myself from HIV?

- **Know how HIV is transmitted.** HIV is not spread through casual contact, like sitting next to someone, sharing a bathroom, or hugging.
- **If you are having sex, practice safer sex.** This means using a barrier method of protection, like a *latex* or *polyurethane condom* or the *Reality (Female) condom* and *water-based lube* for vaginal or anal sex. Use *dental dams* for oral sex on a vagina or anus, and *flavored condoms* for oral sex on a penis. Cover any open cuts on your hands with a barrier like a *latex glove*. Using condoms and dental dams correctly greatly reduces your risk of becoming infected with or transmitting HIV.
- **Do not share needles or syringes for injecting drugs, medications or hormones, tattooing, or piercing.** Call the State AIDS Factline for information about safer injection and needle exchange.
- **Talk to your sexual partners** about their sexual and drug use histories, safer sex, and HIV testing.

I'm pregnant. What do I need to know about HIV? It is very important for pregnant women to be tested for HIV. HIV can be passed from the mother to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth, or while she is breastfeeding. There are treatments for pregnant women that can lower the chance of transmitting HIV to their babies. It is also important for pregnant and breastfeeding women to protect themselves from HIV in the ways listed above.

For more information about HIV and AIDS call the PA State AIDS Factline at 1-800-662-6080 or visit www.choice-phila.org

What is an HIV Test?

This test checks you for antibodies to HIV. Usually, a sample of your blood is tested. There is also an oral test (*Orasure*) that examines tissue from your mouth and does not involve any needles.



Why should I be tested? If you think you might be at risk for HIV, it is important to be tested. The earlier you know you are positive, the sooner you can begin to control the virus. With proper treatment, it is possible to live a long, healthy life with HIV. In addition, if you know your status, you can protect others from infection. If your test is negative, the counselors at the testing site can tell you how to protect yourself and stay safe.

When should I be tested? You can be tested for HIV at any time. The test is looking for antibodies which may take anywhere from a few weeks to six months to develop in your body, but most people can be tested 25 days after being exposed to HIV. This is called the "*window period*". If you have been exposed to HIV recently, remember that your test will be the most

accurate after those six months have passed. Also, someone who is HIV positive can transmit the virus during this window period, even though he/she may not test positive on the antibody test.

What is the difference between anonymous and confidential testing? All HIV test results are protected by the law. If you choose *confidential* testing, a medical record will be created using your name but no one can see the results without your permission. If you choose *anonymous* testing, your name is never recorded at the test site. You are assigned a code and your results cannot be linked back to you, even by the people who work at the clinic.

How long do I have to wait for my results? Most HIV test results are available in 7-14 days. A *rapid test* gives results back in about an hour. The counseling, testing, and results are done at the same location and the same window period applies.



How accurate is the HIV test? After the window period, both the blood and oral HIV tests are **99.7-99.9%** accurate.

How much does an HIV test cost?

At many testing sites, an HIV test is free or costs very little. The price may vary depending on where you choose to be tested.

What does a positive HIV test result mean? A positive test result means that you have been infected with HIV. This does not mean that you have AIDS or that you will get sick right away. With a good doctor and proper treatment, it is possible to stay healthy for a long time. There are many resources to connect you with the services you may need.

What does a negative HIV test result mean? A negative test result means you have not developed antibodies to HIV. Remember—it can take up to six months for your body to produce these antibodies. You might want to be re-tested in three to six months if there is a chance you were exposed to HIV in the recent past.

How can I be tested? You can start by calling the State AIDS Factline at 1-800-662-6080 for answers to questions about HIV/AIDS and the locations of testing sites close to you. The Factline also has information about other sexually transmitted infections, birth control, and pregnancy.

CHOICE

This fact sheet was produced by CHOICE. For more information about sexual health call 215-985-3300 or visit www.choice-phila.org, www.choiceteens.org, and www.wheretofind.org