# Should I Get an HIV Test?

## Who should get tested?

**You should consider getting tested if you:**

- had oral, vaginal, or anal sex with anyone without using a condom;
- had or have a sexually transmitted disease, tuberculosis, or hepatitis;
- shared needles for injecting drugs, or had sex with someone who does;
- exchanged sex for money or drugs; or
- had sex with a male or female prostitute.

## What is an HIV antibody test?

**The only way to tell if you have HIV is to be tested.** An HIV test is not a test for AIDS. The test looks for antibodies to HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. HIV antibodies are produced by an infected person's body to fight HIV infection. If you test positive for HIV antibodies, it means HIV is in your body.

## When should I get tested?

**You should wait about three months after you might have come in contact with HIV before getting tested.** Because it can take weeks for HIV antibodies to show up on the test, people who were recently infected can still test negative. During this waiting period, it is important that you avoid any risky behaviors that could cause another exposure. Don't have sex, or if you do have sex, be sure to use latex condoms every time. Avoid injecting drugs, but if you do, don't share your works (needles and syringes). If you must share your works, be sure to clean them with bleach and water.

## Why get tested?

**Many people have done something they later have second thoughts about.** You may be feeling that way right now. Maybe something else happened that now causes concern for your health. In situations like these, taking the test with a negative result may bring you peace of mind.

**It's important to know if you have HIV.** If you test positive, you can take steps to be certain you don't accidentally pass HIV to your loved ones or anyone else. Knowing you have HIV can also help you make needed changes to protect your own health. While there is no cure for HIV, recent advances in medication provide clear benefits to early treatment. People with HIV can lead long and healthy lives by getting help early.

## Where can I get tested?

**There are probably several locations in your city or county where you can get tested for little or no cost.** Many local health departments, family planning clinics, substance abuse programs, and other organizations offer HIV testing sponsored by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). These locations offer confidential testing (where you give your real name) or anonymous testing (where you don't). You may also ask your doctor. To find an HIV testing site near you, call 2-1-1.

## What happens when I go for an HIV test?

At DSHS testing sites, a counselor will discuss taking the test. You will be asked to talk about what concerns you. Why do you think there's a chance you have HIV? When you take the test, a small amount of blood will be drawn from your arm or finger.

Some locations even take test samples from inside your mouth. The sample is sent to a laboratory for testing. You may have to wait two weeks or more for your test results. Talk to your counselor about when you are to come back and make sure you return for your results. At DSHS-funded HIV testing sites, test results can only be given in person, not over the telephone or by mail.

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## What does a negative result mean?

A negative test result means there were no HIV antibodies found at the time of the test. But if you've had any type of sex without a condom or if you've shared needles within the last three months, you will need to be tested again later. Talk to your counselor honestly about when you have been at risk, and when you might need to come back and be tested again. **A negative HIV test does not mean you are immune from HIV.** If you have unprotected sex or share needles, you could still get infected in the future.

## What does a positive result mean?

The HIV antibody test is very accurate. All positive results are repeated and confirmed before the results are given to you. A positive result means you are infected with HIV. It is not a death sentence. People with HIV can live in good health for many years with no signs of illness. You will be encouraged to see a doctor and have other tests done right away to see how your immune system is working and check for other infections. In addition, your HIV counselor can give you the names of organizations that can help you.

If you test positive, your counselor or another public health professional will talk to you about how to tell your sex or needle sharing partners. While this can be hard to talk about, your partners need to know they are at risk. Public health professionals are skilled at telling partners confidentially (that is: without letting them know **anything** about you). You may want to use this service instead of telling partners yourself.

## How do I prevent HIV and protect others?

You took the HIV test because something happened that put you at risk for getting the virus. It will be important for you to take a look at some of the things you do and make changes. Here are some of the things you can do to be safer:

- **Don't have sex.** This is the surest way to avoid getting HIV through sex.
- **Only have sex with one person who is only having sex with you.** Make sure both of you have tested negative for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- **Use a latex condom every time you have sex.** When used correctly, latex condoms provide good protection against HIV. Be sure to put the condom on before the penis touches the vagina, mouth, or anus.
- **Talk with your sexual partners about using condoms.** Don't wait until the heat of the moment.
- **Use only water-based lubricants with condoms such as KY and Astroglide.** Never use oil-based lubricants like Vaseline, baby oil, hand lotion, or grease. These can cause condoms to break.
- **Don't share needles to shoot drugs or for anything else.** If you have to share, learn how to clean your needles.
- **Alcohol and drug use can lead to risky decisions about sex.** If you're having problems with alcohol and/or drugs, there are programs available for people who want to stop using.

For HIV/STD testing locations in Texas, call: 2-1-1

For other HIV/STD questions, call:
1 (800) CDC-INFO (English/Español)
1 (888) 232-6348 (TTY)

For more information, go to: www.dshs.state.tx.us/hivstd

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