



Information about HIV Testing

What is the HIV test?

This test can tell if you have human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS. HIV weakens the body's immune system. When the immune system is damaged so much that the person can get serious infections or cancers this is called AIDS. People infected with HIV may have no symptoms for many years. Even without symptoms damage to the immune system happens and infected people can still pass the virus to others

The test is usually done using blood taken from a vein with a needle. Sometimes it can be done using blood from sticking your finger or fluid from inside your mouth (oral fluid). If your first test is done with oral fluid or blood from a finger stick and is positive we will take blood from a vein for a second test to confirm the results.

Why does VA want to test me for HIV?

Testing is recommended for all patients, even those who do not think they may have been exposed to HIV. For some patients who have had a possible exposure or who have symptoms suggesting they might have HIV infection repeat testing may be recommended.

How will the HIV test help me?

If you have HIV, the sooner you know, the sooner you can take steps to stay healthy. There are effective treatments that help people with HIV live longer and healthier lives. If you learn you have HIV, you can take steps to avoid spreading the virus to others. You can get care for HIV at VA. Your HIV test result will not affect your VA care or eligibility for VA benefits.

What are the possible risks of this test?

- You may feel sad, depressed, angry or anxious if you learn you have HIV. This is natural. If these feelings are severe, your provider can refer you to someone at VA who can help you.
- If other people find out about the HIV diagnosis, some people may treat you unfairly.

Protecting your privacy

VA will not give your HIV test results to anyone except your caregivers or providers unless you give permission in writing except in these SPECIAL CASES

- Within VA for medical care
- With a VA health care provider or employee in case an employee comes into contact with your blood, such as by an accidental needle-stick
- Within VA if the VA needs the information to see if you qualify for VA benefits;
- With a specific health care provider in an emergency if the information is required to provide you with medical care
- To report to public health authorities
- If ordered by a court of law
- If the Department of Defense requests it (to use for treatment or benefits);
- If Congress requests it for VA program oversight (your name will not be used)
- For VA-approved scientific research (your name will not be used)
- To evaluate patient care
- If you tell a VA provider that you have unprotected sex with someone and will not tell them your HIV status the provider can tell them to protect their health.

What happens if I refuse to have this test?

You have the right to refuse to have this test done. If you refuse to have this test, your health care providers may not have all the information needed to take the best care of you.

What are the alternatives to having this test done in VA?

You can have an HIV test done outside VA. If you have a test done outside VA you will have to pay any cost yourself. In some places you can get an HIV test done anonymously (without giving your name.)

What HIV test results mean: When testing is completed the result is reported to your provider. Your provider will tell you the result. Possible results are:

Positive: result means that you have an HIV infection and you can pass it to others.

Negative: result means either you do not have HIV or got it so recently that your body has not had time to make enough antibodies to be seen by the test. If your result is negative but other things seem to point to HIV as a possibility you should have the test repeated later.

Indeterminate: means that the test did not show whether or not you have HIV. This could happen if you have another medical condition that interfered with the test or have been infected recently. If you have an indeterminate HIV test result, you need to have an HIV test repeated at a later date to find out for sure if you have HIV.

What everyone needs to know about how HIV spreads from person to person.

- People spread HIV by:
 - Unprotected (without a condom) sexual contact.
 - Sharing needles or "works" (cookers and other things used to prepare drugs for injection) during drug use.
 - From an HIV infected woman to her baby during pregnancy, labor, or breastfeeding
- You can reduce risk by:
 - Not having sex
 - Using a condom every time you have sex.
- For pregnant women there are drugs that will improve your health and reduce the risk to the baby
- You can get HIV any time you inject drugs and share needles or works. .You can reduce the risk by:
 - Not injecting drugs
 - Never sharing needles or works.

You should find out how and when you will get your HIV test results.

If your HIV test is positive, you can still get care at VA. Your provider may refer you to another medical professional for follow-up care.

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