

HIV TESTING

What is HIV?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is a virus which reduces the body's ability to fight infection by attacking cells (known as CD4 cells) in a person's immune system. CD4 cells are a type of white blood cell that fights infection.

What is AIDS?

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is the term used for infections and illnesses which occur as a result of a weakened immune system in people who are infected with HIV. Without treatment of HIV, AIDS can occur several years after a person becomes infected with HIV.

How does someone become infected with HIV?

An infected person can pass the virus on to someone else by the exchange of body fluids such as blood, semen and vaginal fluids.

HIV can be transmitted by:

- vaginal or anal sex without a condom
- sharing drug injecting equipment, or other blood contact into the skin such as skin piercing and tattoos with equipment that is not sterilised properly
- a HIV positive mother passing the virus to her baby through pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding

HIV is rarely transmitted by:

- oral sex without a condom
- sharp injuries or splashes (e.g. needle-stick injuries for health care workers)

HIV has never been reported as being transmitted by:

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

What is the HIV antibody test?

It is a blood test which detects HIV antigens and antibodies. Antigens are parts of the virus and antibodies are produced by the human body in response to an infection. If you are infected with HIV, then HIV antigens and antibodies will be present in your blood.

What does a positive HIV test result mean?

A positive test result means that a person has been infected with HIV. All positive tests are confirmed by further testing. There are many supports available for people who test positive for HIV.

What does a negative HIV test result mean?

It means either

- that a person has not been infected with HIV **or**
- that a person has been infected with HIV but has not yet produced enough antigens or antibodies for the test to find them. The test is usually accurate after 6 weeks but it can take up to three months for antibodies to develop after infection with HIV. This is called the window period.

What does an indeterminate HIV test result mean?

Sometimes a result is neither positive nor negative. This can be caused by several factors and does not mean that the test will be positive on future tests. Further testing is done if there is an indeterminate result.

What is rapid testing?

Rapid tests for HIV are now available in some clinics in Australia. These tests can provide results within 30 minutes, however reactive results still need to be confirmed by further laboratory tests.

CANBERRA SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE

What are the advantages of having a HIV test?

- HIV treatments improve the duration and quality of life for people with HIV if the virus is detected early
- knowledge of your HIV status may help you to negotiate safe sex and/or injecting behaviours. A negative result may be a great relief BUT ensure that you protect yourself from risk in the future

How do I get my results?

Your practitioner will talk with you about whether you can receive your results in person or over the phone.

Things to consider before testing:

- receiving a positive HIV antibody test result can be a traumatic event, however support and counselling are readily available
- people with HIV may 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
- there are legal requirements regarding sex in Australian States and Territories for people with HIV
- information provided to Canberra Sexual Health Centre (CSHC) is confidential. Testing for HIV at CSHC is performed on coded (not named) specimens
- HIV and AIDS are notifiable infections. This means that doctors and laboratory staff are required to tell ACT Health about new cases, but the information provided is coded – no names or identifying information are given. This information is also confidential and used for planning health services

Where can I get tested for HIV in Canberra?

Canberra Sexual Health Centre

Building 5, Level 1, North Wing
Yamba Drive Garran
Ph: (02) 6244 2184

Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT

Level 1, 28 University Avenue
Canberra ACT 2601
Ph: (02) 6247 3077

General Practitioners (GPs) in Canberra

<http://health.act.gov.au/health-services/find-a-health-service>

Winnunga Nimmitjiah Aboriginal Health Service

63 Boolimba Crescent
Narrabundah ACT 2604
Phone: (02) 6284 6222
Free call: 1800 110 290 or 1800 120 859

Where can I get HIV rapid testing in Canberra?

Interchange General Practice

Level 3, 28 University Avenue
Canberra ACT 2601
Ph: (02) 6247 3077

Airport General Practice

Mustang Avenue
Majura Park
Ph: (02) 6248 2600

Useful websites

<http://endinghiv.org.au/test-more/all-about-hiv-testing/>

<http://www.afao.org.au/about-hiv/hiv-test>

<http://aidsaction.org.au/services-programs/testing/>

To access information about HIV testing in other languages:

<http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/search?SearchableText=HIV+>

References:

Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (2012) HIV Testing and Results Factsheet. Accessed www.mshc.org.au
NSW STI Programs Unit (2011) HIV and AIDS Factsheet. Accessed <http://www.stipu.nsw.gov.au>

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with general information only. It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with a health practitioner. All clients are advised to enquire about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been made to ensure that this information is correct at the time of publishing.