

HIV Testing: What You Need to Know



What is HIV and how is it transmitted?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It passes from a person with HIV infection to an uninfected person during unprotected sex (vaginal or anal sex without a condom). HIV also passes between persons through contact with blood when sharing needles (piercing, tattooing or injecting drugs of any kind). HIV can pass from a pregnant woman to a fetus during pregnancy or birth. A mother may also pass HIV to her infant when breastfeeding.

What is an HIV test?

Tests for HIV usually measure HIV antibodies, a substance your body makes if you have HIV infection.

A positive test result

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

A negative test result

means you do not have HIV infection unless, in rare instances, you were exposed to HIV so recently that an HIV test cannot detect it.

Why is an HIV test important for me?

HIV testing is a routine part of health care services. About one out of five persons living with HIV do not know they have HIV infection. Because they are not aware of this, they are not getting early treatment which can help keep them healthy. They may also be passing HIV to others without knowing it.

It is important for you to know whether or not you are infected because, if you have infection, you can obtain important medical care. You can take HIV drugs that can help increase the quality of your life and prevent complications from HIV infection.

Pregnant women with HIV infection are much less likely to pass HIV to their fetus during pregnancy or birth when they are receiving HIV drugs.

Do I have a choice?

Yes, it's your choice — you can decide whether you want an HIV test. Health care services and treatment cannot be denied if you decide not to be tested.

Who will be told if I have HIV infection?

State law permits only a very limited number of people to know if someone has HIV infection. Positive HIV test results are reported to public health officials. Strict state laws safeguard confidential information on HIV.

Who can assist someone who is recently diagnosed with HIV infection?

Your health care provider can help a person who has HIV infection in obtaining the services they may need, including assistance from the local health department.

There are community-based agencies like AIDS service organizations and other agencies that can help persons with HIV infection find services like case management, drug payment assistance, housing, legal assistance, as well as several other services.

For more information on resources in Wisconsin, contact the Wisconsin HIV/STD/Hepatitis C Information and Referral Center by calling toll free at 800-334-2437 or visiting the Information and Referral Center website at www.irc-wisconsin.org