

HIV Testing: What You Need to Know



What is HIV and how is it passed from person to person?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that attacks the body's immune system and can lead to advanced stage HIV or AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome).

A person living with HIV can pass the virus to others if they are not receiving the right treatment. HIV is most commonly passed through:

- ◆ Sex
- ◆ Sharing needles or other drug injection equipment



People who are pregnant or breastfeeding should know:

- ◆ HIV treatment can prevent a person living with HIV from passing HIV on to their baby before or during birth.
- ◆ HIV can be passed to a child through breast milk from a person living with HIV.



Why is HIV testing important?

About one out of five people living with HIV do not know they have HIV. This means they are missing out on treatment that could help them live a long, healthy life. The right treatment plan can also mean never passing HIV on to a partner.

An HIV test is the only way to know whether you have HIV. It's important to get tested regularly if you are at risk for HIV.



How can I prevent HIV?

There are more ways to prevent HIV now than ever before. If someone living with HIV is on the right treatment plan, it can mean never passing HIV on to partners sexually. Other ways to prevent HIV are:

- ◆ Wear condoms
- ◆ Use PrEP: one pill, once a day or an injection given every other month that prevents HIV
- ◆ Avoid sharing needles when injecting drugs



Do I have a choice?

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



Who will be told if I have HIV?

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



Who can assist people if they test positive?

There are many medical and social services available for people living with HIV at no or low cost to the person. Your health care provider can help connect you to these services, or you can get assistance from the local health department.

There are community-based organizations that can help people living with HIV find services that include:

- ◆ Specialized HIV medical care
- ◆ Payment assistance for HIV medication
- ◆ HIV case management
- ◆ Mental health services
- ◆ Housing assistance
- ◆ Food assistance
- ◆ Legal assistance

For more information on resources in Wisconsin, visit the Wisconsin HIV Program website at www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/hiv/index.htm.

There are three possible HIV test results:

- ◆ A negative screening test result means that you probably do not have HIV. However, if you were recently exposed to HIV, it may be too soon to find out if you have HIV. Re-testing may be necessary.
- ◆ A positive screening test result means that the test detected HIV in your blood. If this is the first time you tested positive for HIV, it is highly recommended that another test be done to confirm the result.
- ◆ An invalid screening test result is neither negative nor positive. You should be tested again as soon as possible.

No test is 100% accurate. Additional testing may be needed or recommended.

