

# A Patient's Guide to HIV Testing

## What is HIV?

**Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)** is a virus that slowly weakens your body's ability to fight other infections. In the early stages, you may not know you are infected because there are few symptoms and you can feel healthy. However, if not treated, it can get worse. Over time, it may become **AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)**. People with AIDS get very sick and can die from the disease.

## Why get tested for HIV?

Many people with HIV do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. If you have HIV, it is important to know so you can protect yourself and others. If you get tested and find out you are positive:

- **You can get treatment.** Many medications treat HIV. HIV medications are safe and have few side effects. They can slow the virus and stop it from turning into AIDS. Early treatment improves your chances of living a long and healthy life.
- **You can avoid spreading HIV to others.** HIV is spread from one person to another by body fluids (blood, semen, and vaginal fluids). This can happen during sex (anal, vaginal, or oral) or when sharing needles. If you have HIV, you can give it to others, even if you feel perfectly healthy.

If you know you have HIV, you can begin treatment with HIV medication. Treatment lowers the virus level inside you, making it harder to spread. You should also:

- Practice safe sex by always using a condom for all sex acts (anal, vaginal, and oral).
- Don't share razors, needles, toothbrushes, or any item that could contain your blood.



By keeping your virus level low, using safe sex practices, and following blood safety steps, the chance of passing the virus to another person is very low.

## Who should be tested for HIV?

The CDC recommends that everyone should be tested for HIV at least once in their life. You should be tested more often if you have had experiences that make HIV infection more likely. You should be tested more often if you have:

- Had a sexual partner that has HIV.
- Been diagnosed with any other sexually transmitted infection (STI), such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, or syphilis.
- Had unprotected anal, vaginal, or oral sex.
- Had unprotected sex with multiple people, or you had sex with people you don't know.
- Been sexually assaulted (raped).
- Shared needles or pieces of your 'rig' during drug use.

Learn more about your risk by using the CDC's [\*\*Risk Reduction Tool\*\*](#)

## What happens during an HIV test?

An HIV test looks for HIV and antibodies in your blood. If the test is positive for HIV, a second confirmation test is always done to make sure it is correct.

During the test, you have a band put around your arm, and your arm swabbed with an alcohol pad to clean it. A needle is inserted into your vein to collect a small amount of blood. The tube of blood is sent to the lab, where it is tested. Testing takes about 2 days.

**Caution: Normal HIV tests can not detect HIV if you were infected within the last 2 weeks.** If you feel you may have been exposed to HIV in the last 14 days, tell your care team. They will order a special type of HIV test that can find new HIV infections.

## What do I do while I wait for results?

While waiting for results, continue to practice safe sex and follow blood safety steps to limit the possible spread of the virus. You can also download the [MyHealth+app](#). MyHealth+ allows you to see your results online and send messages to your care team.

## Testing Results

Your results will be posted in MyHealth+. If you have **indeterminant** or **reactive (positive)** results, a member of the HIV care team will also call you. Make sure your care team has a phone number they can use to contact you. There are 3 kinds of results:

- **Non-reactive (Negative).** This means that it is very unlikely you have HIV. The test didn't find any HIV or antibodies in your blood.
- **Indeterminant.** This means that something in the test did not work right. It does not mean you are more or less likely to have HIV. A member of the HIV team will contact you to schedule a new test.

- **Reactive (Positive).** This means that you likely have HIV. Another type of HIV test, called a confirmation test, will be done on your blood sample. This is to make sure the first test was not a false-positive. The confirmation test is done automatically by the lab. You do not need your blood drawn again or see your doctor. The results of the confirmation test will be available within 24 hours. A member of the HIV care team will call you with your results.

If your first test **AND** the confirmation test are positive, you have HIV.

## What if I have HIV?

Intermountain will help you connect to HIV care. **An HIV specialist will call and talk with you about your questions and concerns.** They will set up an appointment with you for a clinic visit. You might begin HIV medication on your first visit. Following your doctor's instructions and taking your HIV medication will be very important in helping you live a long and healthy life.

Besides taking your medicine, you will need to always practice safe sex and take blood safety steps so that you do not spread the virus to others.

## How can I prevent HIV infection?

Practice safe sex by always using a condom from start to finish in every sex act. Have your sexual partners get tested for HIV. Practice blood safety by not sharing anything that may have blood on it, such as needles, razors, or toothbrushes.

If you do not have HIV and are likely to keep having sex without a condom, talk with your doctor. Medications known as PrEP can lower your chances of getting HIV when having unprotected sex.

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