



HIV Testing in the Black Community

Why should I think about HIV testing?

Taking an HIV test allows you to know your HIV status. If you know your status, you are better able to protect yourself and others from the virus. If you have engaged in any of these behaviors, you should consider testing:

- Engaged in any form of unprotected sexual activity
- Used unsterilized needles/syringes for injecting drugs, hormones or other agents.

How do you test for HIV?

There are three primary types of HIV tests you can choose to take, depending upon where you decide to get your test. These tests look for HIV antibodies, not the virus itself. These tests are all very accurate:

- **Oral swab:** A test that examines a sample swabbed from the inside of the mouth with results generally available within a week.



- **Blood test:** Blood is drawn and collected into a tube for testing. If antibodies are present, they will be contained in that fluid.

- **Rapid HIV test:** A finger-prick blood test, which can return results in as little as 10-20 minutes.

There are two tests that measure HIV in the blood directly. These are generally less accessible and may be expensive.

- A p24 antigen (a substance that stimulates the production of antibodies) test measures a specific protein of the virus in the blood.

- An RNA viral load test: A test that measures the quantity of HIV viral RNA in

the blood. This test is mostly used to measure the effectiveness of drugs used to treat HIV infected people, then to assess whether someone is infected with HIV.

Ask your local testing site what types of test they provide.

How should I prepare myself for an HIV test?

Be prepared to answer intimate, detailed questions about your sexual activity and practices, drug history, and HIV exposure. The more honest you can be with the HIV testing counselor, the better he/she will be able to educate you in preventing yourself from becoming HIV-positive or transmitting the virus to someone else. Test counselors are trained and certified to handle intimate topics and you will be encouraged to ask questions.

What does a positive test result mean?

It does mean:

- That the person is infected with HIV
- That the person can transmit the virus to others

It does not mean:

- That the person has AIDS
- That the person will necessarily develop—or immediately die from—AIDS

What does a negative test result mean?

It does mean:

- That no HIV antibodies were present at the time of the test

It does not mean:

- That a person is not infected with HIV because it can take up to six months for antibodies to reach detectable levels in the bloodstream
- That a person is immune or resistant to HIV/AIDS

Are the result confidential?

In addition to various methods of screening for HIV, there are different ways that the results of the test are recorded, affecting the confidentiality of the results.

- Confidential HIV Testing—Includes the person's name along with the test result, giving medical personnel and, in certain states, the state health department, access to the results. In some cases, a release waiver allows for results to become part of patient's medical record, which may be seen by healthcare workers, insurers, or employers.
- Anonymous HIV Testing—Never associates a person's name with the HIV test or the results so that only the person who underwent the test knows the result.

Where can I go to get a test?

HIV testing sites include stand-alone HIV counseling and testing centers, local health departments, hospitals, private doctors offices, and STD clinics. To find the HIV testing center nearest you, call CDC's National HIV Testing Hotline at 800-342-AIDS or your local health department, talk to your doctor, or go online at www.hivtest.org.

What can I do to reduce my risk?

You can reduce your risk by avoiding contact with fluids that cause HIV. For example:

- Always practice safer sex.
- Abstain from sex unless you and your partner are both HIV-negative and in a long-term monogamous relationship.
- Do not use injection drugs, or, if you do, always use new or clean needles.
- Find out your HIV status if you are planning to get pregnant. If you are HIV-positive, work with a knowledgeable doctor and obstetrician.