

Get the Facts About HIV Testing



Many people living with HIV don't know they have it. That's why it's so important to get tested — it's the only way to know for sure if you have HIV.

Knowing whether you have HIV can help you take steps to protect your health.

Do I need to get tested for HIV?

Everyone ages 13 to 64 needs to get tested for HIV at least once as part of their regular health care. Ask your doctor how often you need to get tested for HIV.

People at risk of getting HIV need to get tested at least once a year. You need to get tested as soon as possible if you haven't been tested in the last year and you:

- Have sex with someone who has HIV
- Don't know if your partner has HIV
- Have more than 1 partner
- Have a partner who has sex with other people
- Have been diagnosed with an STD (sexually transmitted disease), hepatitis, or TB (tuberculosis)
- Inject drugs and share needles or other injection equipment with other people

And if you think you could have come in contact with HIV in the last 3 days, **talk to your doctor about taking a medicine called PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) and getting an HIV test.**

I'm pregnant. Do I need to get an HIV test?

Yes. It's a good idea to get tested for HIV as soon as possible. That way you can start treatment right away if you find out you do have HIV. If you start treatment early and stick with your treatment plan, your risk of passing HIV to your baby is very low.





Where can I get an HIV test?

You can ask your doctor or nurse for an HIV test. Many community health centers, local health departments, hospitals, and drug and alcohol use programs offer HIV tests, too.

Visit [gettested.cdc.gov](https://www.gettested.cdc.gov) or call **800-CDC-INFO** (800-232-4636) to find HIV testing near you, including places that offer free or low-cost tests.

You can also buy an HIV self-test kit and take the test at home or another private location. Buy a self-test kit online or at a pharmacy or see if your local health department or a community organization offers them.

Will my insurance cover HIV testing?

Most health insurance plans cover the full cost of HIV testing at a doctor's office or other testing site. This includes private insurance plans and public programs like Medicaid and Medicare. If you buy a self-test, your insurance may not cover the cost. Check with your insurance company to see if your plan will cover a self-test.

Keep in mind that even if you don't have insurance, you can still find free or low-cost testing sites.

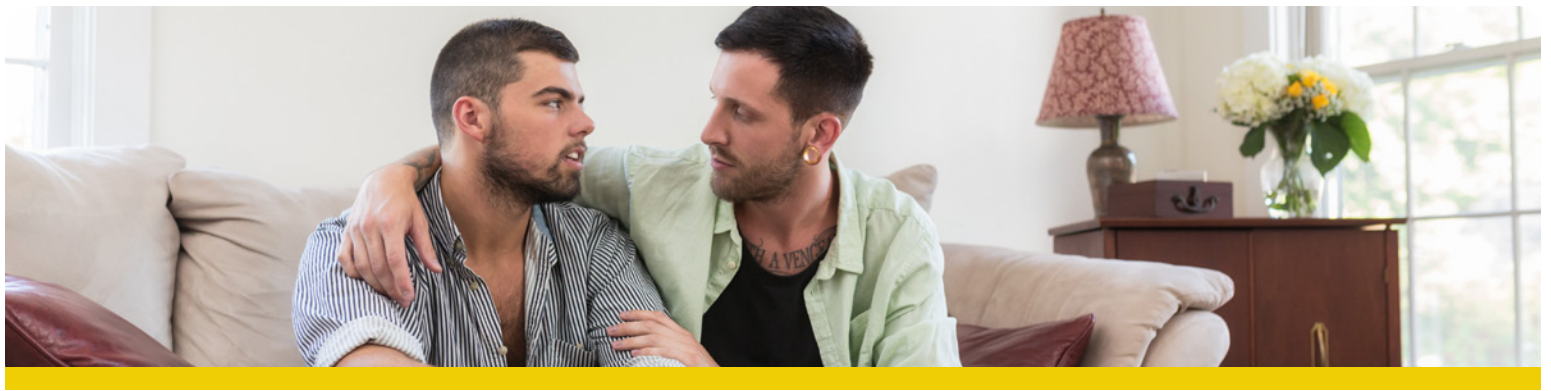


How do HIV tests work?

Some HIV tests use a sample of your blood to see if there's HIV in your body. To give you the test, a nurse or other staff member will use a needle to take a small amount of blood from your finger or a vein in your arm.

Other HIV tests use your saliva (spit). A nurse or other staff member will rub the inside of your cheek or your gums with a soft swab to collect the saliva.

If you use a self-test, you'll prick your own finger or swab your own gums.



What does my HIV test result mean?

Positive result

If you get a positive test result, you may have HIV. **You'll need to get a 2nd test to make sure the result is right.**

- If you got the 1st test through a community testing program or took a self-test, you'll need to go to a doctor's office for your 2nd test
- If you got the 1st test at a doctor's office or hospital, the same lab that looked at your 1st test will do the 2nd test — usually using the same blood or saliva sample you gave them before

If your 2nd test is positive, it means you have HIV. **It's important to find an HIV doctor and start treatment as soon as possible so you can stay healthy.**

It's also important to **tell your sex partners or anyone you've shared needles with.** Keep in mind that in some states, the law requires you to tell them — but telling anyone else is your decision.

How long will it take to get my result?

If the testing site needs to send your blood or saliva sample to a lab, it may take several days to get your result. But some tests — including self-tests that use saliva samples — give results in less than 30 minutes.





Negative result

If you get a negative test result, it may mean you don't have HIV. However, it's possible to get a negative test result and have HIV if you've come in contact with HIV and you got tested during the **window period**.

The window period is the time between when you came in contact with HIV and when a test can tell for sure that you have it. Ask your doctor how long the window period usually is for the test you're taking.

If you test negative after the window period and didn't come in contact with HIV during that time, then you don't have HIV.

Even if you test negative, it's still important to protect yourself from HIV. Ask your doctor what steps you can take.

Can other people find out my test result?

If you get an **anonymous test**, no one but you will know the result unless you tell others. Self-tests are anonymous, and some testing sites offer anonymous tests.

If you get a **confidential test**, the result will go in your medical record. That means your doctor — and your insurance company if you have one — could see your result.



To learn more about HIV, visit:
nmlm.gov/guides/HIV-AIDS-Online-Resources