

HIV (AIDS VIRUS) TEST INFORMATION

Public Health - Seattle & King County

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Sndrome). People infected with HIV can spread HIV to others through sex, sharing needles and injection equipment, or donating blood or organs. Infected mothers can spread HIV to their babies. HIV testing is voluntary and can be life-saving. All persons getting services at the STD Clinic at Harborview will be tested for HIV unless they say they do not want to be tested.

This sheet describes HIV testing. It can help you decide whether or not to be tested.

How We Test for HIV; What the Tests Mean

The rapid HIV test we use checks for HIV antibodies. The test performed on blood sent to the lab checks for both HIV antibodies and HIV antigen. Antibodies are the body's response to the virus, and the antigen is a part of the virus. The rapid HIV test in our clinic is available to persons at higher risk for HIV and the result is ready in minutes. A blood specimen test is available to all and the result takes a few days to return. Positive test results are confirmed by further tests.

A CONFIRMED POSITIVE test means that a person is infected with HIV and can infect others. For patients with a confirmed positive test, we will recommend additional blood tests and work with patients to link them to medical care and support services.

A NEGATIVE test means there is no evidence of HIV infection. This usually means that the person does not have HIV. However, sometimes the infection may be too recent for the test to be positive. Current tests usually turn positive 2- 4 weeks after infection. Therefore, if you were infected very recently, a negative test result could be wrong.

Sometimes patients with a positive antigen test have a negative antibody test. This is usually a sign of recent HIV infection. Additional blood tests will make the answer clear.

Benefits of Being Tested

There are important benefits to being tested and knowing your result. People with HIV benefit from medicines that fight the virus. When people with HIV take medicine for HIV, they are less likely to pass it to someone else. Some people who have a negative HIV test might decide to start

medications to prevent themselves from getting HIV...this is called pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP. Many people find that knowing their test result helps them to protect their partners and themselves. Some people want to know their test result before starting a new sexual relationship or becoming pregnant. Most people who test will feel better by learning that they do not have HIV.

Risks and Disadvantages of Being Tested

Some people may feel stressed before, during or after HIV testing. This is especially true when the result is positive. Some people with a negative test might think that they are safe from getting HIV infection and do not need to take precautions to stay HIV-negative. Some people are afraid that their test result will get into the wrong hands, leading to discrimination. You might want to consider who you would talk to for support if your test came back positive.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Washington State law requires care providers and laboratories to report the names of HIV-infected persons to the local health department for disease monitoring. Those names are then reported to the WA State Department of Health and maintained for disease monitoring. The confidentiality of HIV testing records is strongly protected by law. Penalties for violations of the law are severe.

Getting Test Results & Notifying Partners

You can get your test result in-person, by phone, or by through MyChart. If your test result is positive, we ask that you come back into the clinic. If you test positive and do not get the result, we will try to contact you to tell you the result and provide assistance. However, while we will try to contact you, we are not always successful in doing so. Please follow-up to get your result.

If your test is positive, people with whom you have had sex or shared needles or other injection equipment need to be told that they should be tested for HIV. If you do not want to or cannot inform your partner(s), we can tell them for you without sharing your name.

Your HIV test and personal information may be used for disease and risk monitoring and research. We sometimes store blood samples to check the quality of our lab methods.