

What You Need to Know About an HIV Test

MAN OR WOMAN, GAY OR STRAIGHT, YOUNG OR OLD,
EVERY BODY NEEDS AN **HIV** TEST. 

**ANY
BODY
CAN GET
HIV**

**NEW YORK
KNOWS**

WHAT'S YOUR HIV STATUS?

stay safe + get care + get tested

NYC
Health

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Know Your HIV Status

Do you know your HIV status?

Many New Yorkers — more than 110,000 — are living with HIV. *But as many as one in five don't know it.*

Man or woman, gay or straight, young or old, everyone should be screened for HIV. It's an important part of staying healthy.

Negative or positive, it's important to know. If you test negative, you can learn how to stay that way.

If you test positive, you can take steps to live a healthy, productive life. See *If Your Results Are Positive* on page 4.



Anyone Can Get an HIV Test

New York State law requires health care providers to offer an HIV test to all patients between 13 and 64 years of age in most health care settings.

Voluntary

Getting tested to protect your health and the health of others is a smart thing to do — and it's your choice. You can withdraw your consent at any time.

Anyone can get an HIV test, regardless of health insurance or immigration status. You do *not* need a parent's permission to get tested, even if you're under 18 years of age.



Free

You *don't* have to pay for an HIV test. Free tests are available at Health Department clinics. Call **311** for a clinic near you, or visit [nyc.gov](https://www.nyc.gov) and search for *STD Clinics*.

Confidential

From the minute you walk into a Health Department clinic or a doctor's office, your privacy is protected by law. The law applies to everyone, including people in jail or prison.

What to Expect

HIV tests

There are different kinds of HIV tests. Some use a blood sample and some use a mouth swab.

Most HIV screening tests look for HIV antibodies. Antibodies are proteins your body makes to fight off HIV infection.

When a test finds HIV antibodies, it means you are probably infected with HIV and are HIV positive. All positive tests require a second test to confirm the results.

Your results

How soon you get your test results depends on what kind of test you take. Most tests give results within an hour and don't need to be sent to a lab. If a lab processes your test, it may take more than one hour for the result.

- **If your results are negative**, it means you are not infected with HIV, unless you were exposed very recently. HIV tests might not become positive until two months after the last exposure to HIV.
- **If your results are positive (preliminary positive)**, it means you are most likely infected with HIV. A second test is necessary, however, to confirm a positive result.



If Your Results Are Negative

A *negative* result typically means the test you took did *not* find HIV antibodies.

Even if you test negative, you could still have HIV if you were infected during the two-month period before you took the test.

- It can take up to two months after a person is infected to make HIV antibodies. If you were infected with HIV *up to two months* before you were tested, there may not be enough antibodies in your system to show up on the test.
- If you could have been exposed to HIV in the two-month period before the test (by having unprotected sex, for example), your provider will ask you to come back for another test in two to six months.
- It's very important *not* to engage in risky behavior before you take another test—so you don't put yourself and others at risk for HIV.

If you did *not* engage in activities that could spread HIV during the two months before your test, then a negative result means you did not have HIV when you were tested.

Your health care provider will help you understand what your results mean.

Stay safe. A negative test result does *not* protect you against HIV. Negative or positive, *always* use condoms and *never* share needles, works or medication vials (for example, hormones or steroids). See *Protect Yourself and Others* on page 7.



If Your Results Are Positive

It's hard to be told you're HIV positive. There's a lot to think about and a lot of feelings to handle.

Give yourself credit for getting tested. You did the right thing to protect yourself and the people you love.

You don't have to go through it alone. It's important for everyone with HIV to get as much help as they can.

It's important to take steps to stay healthy and reduce your chance of passing HIV to others.

Positive steps for a positive life

Get medical care

- See a health care provider who specializes in treating HIV. To find an HIV provider, call **311**.
- Talk to your provider about HIV treatment options, such as antiretroviral therapy (ART for short). Today, HIV treatment is easier to take and has fewer side effects.
- Start treatment early — and stick with it. Staying on treatment helps people with HIV live healthier lives.
- Get these two tests regularly:
 - A viral load test, which shows how much HIV is in your blood
 - A CD4 test, which shows how well your immune system is holding up
- Get tested regularly for other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). If you have an STD, get treatment. Having another STD can make it harder to manage HIV.
- **Pregnant women with HIV should start treatment right away.** If you're pregnant or planning pregnancy, ART will improve your health and protect your baby.

Tell your partners

- Tell anyone you may have sex with that you have HIV — *before* you have sex (even if they don't ask).
- Talk to anyone you've had sex with so they can be tested, too. See *Tell Your Partners* on page 6.

Stay safe

- Always use a latex or polyurethane condom with a water-based lubricant when you have sex. Even if the virus isn't detectable in your blood, you could still transmit HIV.
- Reduce the number of people you have sex with. The more partners you have, the greater your risk.
- Take your HIV medication as prescribed. HIV meds greatly reduce your chance of spreading HIV to others.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs when you have sex. Drinking or getting high makes it harder to remember to use condoms.
- If you inject drugs, seek help to stop and don't share needles or other equipment, including medication vials. Sharing equipment increases your risk of getting hepatitis C and transmitting HIV to others. For help with drug or alcohol problems, see page 9.

Discrimination is against the law

By law, all positive HIV tests must be reported to the New York City and State Health Departments. The departments use the information to understand the public health impact of HIV. All reports are strictly confidential.

It's against the law to discriminate against people with HIV. If you believe a landlord, employer or health or service provider has discriminated against you, call the New York City Commission on Human Rights at **311**.



Tell Your Partners

Why it's so important

If you're HIV positive, you may have exposed others.

They deserve to know, so they can be tested for HIV too.

- If your sex or drug partners are HIV positive but don't know, they can spread the virus.
- People who don't know they have HIV also can't get treatment. Without good medical care, they're much more likely to get sick and die earlier.
- **If your partners are notified and tested**, they can get the care they need.

You can do it yourself

- **If you want to, you can tell your own partners.** Tell anyone you have had sex with that they may have been exposed to HIV. Your doctor or counselor can help you find the words. Known contacts will be reported to the Health Department to make sure they're tested.

Or the Health Department can notify your contacts

- By law, Health Department counselors must protect your identity. They will tell your contacts only that they may have been exposed to HIV. They won't say who exposed them, or when, where or how they were exposed. Counselors won't even say whether you're a man or a woman.

For help notifying contacts, you, your doctor or your counselor can call 311 or the Contact Notification Assistance Program (CNAP) at 212-693-1419. CNAP can notify your partners without giving your name.



Protect Yourself and Others

The only way to completely avoid HIV is by not having sex and not sharing needles and works.

If you have sex

You can reduce your risk of getting or spreading HIV and other STDs by taking the following steps:

- **Always use a latex condom** when you have sex — vaginal or anal. Condoms made of “natural” materials, such as lambskin, prevent pregnancy but *not* HIV and other STDs. If you’re allergic to latex, you can use male condoms made of other synthetic materials, such as polyurethane, or the FC2 female condom made of synthetic nitrile.
- **Use a water-based lubricant** for anal and vaginal sex. Oil-based lubricants, such as Vaseline, hand creams and body lotions, weaken latex condoms and should *not* be used.
- **Limit the number of people you have sex with.** The more partners you have, the greater your risk for HIV, STDs and unintended pregnancy.
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs when you have sex.** Drinking or getting high makes it much harder to practice safer sex (such as remembering to use condoms).
- **Get tested and treated** for STDs. Many STDs (including syphilis) make it easier to get and spread HIV.



More Information About HIV

HIV is the human immunodeficiency virus, which causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

- **You can't tell who has HIV** by looking at them. People can be infected with HIV for 10 years or more before showing signs of illness. The only way to know if you're infected is to get an HIV test.
- **HIV weakens the body's immune system** and makes it harder to fight infections. As a result, people with HIV can get serious infections and cancers. That can make them very sick or kill them.
- **By getting good medical care**, people can stay healthier and live longer, even if they have HIV.

How HIV is spread

- **HIV is spread through contact with blood, semen or vaginal fluids** of HIV-infected people.
- **It can be spread by sharing needles, syringes or works** used to inject drugs, vitamins, hormones, steroids or medicines.
- **It can be spread through unprotected (without a condom) vaginal, anal or oral sex.** Unprotected anal sex is the riskiest sexual behavior for HIV.
- **A woman can transmit HIV to her baby** during pregnancy or delivery.
- **HIV also can be spread through breast milk.** Women who are HIV positive should not breastfeed.

HIV is NOT spread through everyday activities

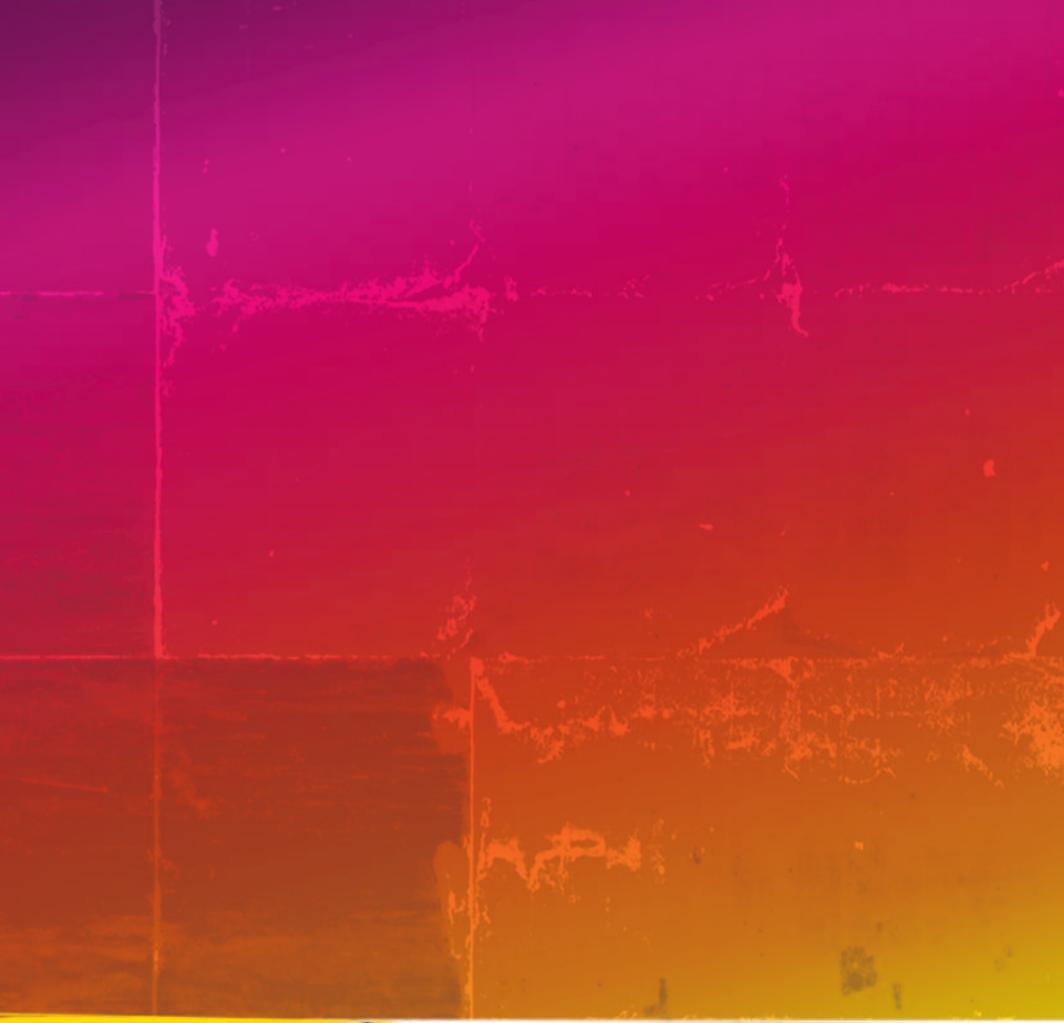
- HIV is not spread through sweat, tears, saliva or a casual kiss from an infected person.
- You can't get HIV from touching objects used by, or sharing food with, people with HIV.
- People can't become infected from mosquito or other insect bites.

Resources

- For more information about HIV and other STDs, including where to get free, confidential testing, call **311** or visit nyc.gov and search for *HIV/AIDS information*.
- For help notifying partners (confidentially or anonymously), call **311** and ask for the **Contact Notification Assistance Program**, or call **212-693-1419**.
- For more information about condoms, call **311** or visit nyc.gov and search for *condoms*. Android and iPhone users can download a free application (called **NYC Condom Finder**) to find nearby places for free condoms.
- For help with depression or alcohol and drug problems, or to find a needle exchange program, call **311** or **LifeNet: 800-LIFENET (800-543-3638)** or **877-AYUDESE (Spanish)**.
- For HIV care, treatment, housing and health insurance assistance, call **311** or visit ryanwhitenyc.org.
- For help with intimate partner violence and other domestic violence, call **311** or **800-621-HOPE (800-621-4673)**. If you're in immediate danger, call **911**.
- For information on discrimination from the New York City Commission on Human Rights, call **311** or visit nyc.gov.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov or hivtest.org.

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Learn more about
HIV testing:

