

HIV/AIDS - Testing

Early testing and treatment can help prevent the spread of HIV—



and help you live longer if you have it. Over 20% of HIV infections are caused by people who do not know they have HIV.

Testing and education are important! If you have HIV, you can learn how to protect your partner(s) and get medical care that will help keep you healthy.

What is an HIV test?

Once you get infected with HIV, your body begins to make *antibodies* to the virus. Antibodies are special substances that fight against infections like HIV. In the case of HIV, these antibodies cannot



completely fight off the infection, but if they are in your body this means that you have been infected with HIV. Most HIV tests look for HIV antibodies rather than looking for HIV virus itself. If HIV testing

shows that you have those antibodies, then you are "HIV-positive." Most of the time, HIV tests can be done rapidly, using blood or *saliva*.

The *Enzyme Immunoassay* (EIA) test is the most common type of HIV test. This is a **first (or preliminary) test** for HIV. If this EIA test comes back **negative**, it means no HIV antibodies were found in your body.

If the EIA test comes back **positive**, it means that you **may** have HIV antibodies in your body. To know for sure, you will

need to have a second test, This is called a **confirmatory** test.

The confirmatory test is called a *Western blot test*. If the Western blot test also shows HIV antibodies, this means you have been infected with HIV. You will be "HIV-positive."

After you have been infected with HIV it can take time for your body to make antibodies to HIV. This is called *seroconversion*. Before seroconversion, your body is not yet making antibodies to the virus, but **the level of HIV in your blood is very high, and you can infect others with HIV.**



There are other special types of HIV tests. They are rarely used, unless you may have been infected with HIV very recently and have not gone through seroconversion. Remember, before

seroconversion you have no antibodies to HIV, so the standard HIV antibody tests are not useful.



Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about HIV/AIDS. Your public health department and health care provider can help.

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