



HIV TESTING AND RESULTS

What is HIV?

(Human Immunodeficiency Virus) HIV is the virus, which can lead to AIDS. Over time HIV may reduce the body's ability to fight infection by attacking key cells (known as CD4 cells) in a person's immune system.

What is AIDS?

(Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)

A person with HIV may, at some point, develop AIDS. Any one of a number of illnesses or infections may indicate that someone has AIDS. A diagnosis of AIDS usually indicates that an individual has had HIV for a number of years. With the advent of effective HIV treatments, we very rarely see cases of AIDS in Australia

How does someone become infected with HIV, am I at risk?

You can become infected if you have unprotected sex with, or share injecting equipment, with someone who has HIV. This is because HIV lives in blood, semen and vaginal secretions. If you've had a risk, have a test.

HIV can be transmitted by:

- Vaginal or anal sexual intercourse without a condom
- Unprotected anal sex between men is considered a high risk activity for HIV transmission
- Sharing drug injecting equipment
- During pregnancy, childbirth, or breast feeding if the mother has HIV
- Sharps or needle stick injuries e.g. healthcare workers

HIV is rarely transmitted by:

- Vaginal or anal sex if condoms have been used correctly
- Oral sex without a condom (ejaculation increases the risk slightly, as may gum disease)
- Skin splashes with HIV infected body fluids

HIV has never been reported as being transmitted by:

- Kissing or cuddling
- Shaking hands/social contact
- Sharing knives and forks, cups or glasses
- Toilet seats or mosquitoes

Safe sex explained

Safe sex means sex where semen, vaginal secretions or blood are not passed between sexual partners. Using condoms during anal and vaginal sex greatly reduces the risk of HIV transmission. Condoms are most effective when used with water based lube and before there is any genital contact.

What is the HIV Antibody test?

It is a blood test, which detects HIV antibodies.

Antibodies are produced by the body in response to an infection. If you are infected with HIV, then HIV antibodies will be present in your blood if you test at least six weeks after your risk for HIV.

What does a negative HIV antibody test result mean?

It means either

- That a person has not been infected with HIV

Or

- That a person has been infected with HIV recently (within the last 6 weeks), but has not yet produced antibodies. Remember it can take up to 6 weeks for antibodies to develop after the initial infection with HIV; this is called **the window period**.

What does a positive HIV test result mean?

A positive HIV test means that an HIV antibody test is positive and it has been confirmed with another HIV test. This means a person has been infected with HIV. This result is not given over the phone.

What does an inconclusive HIV test result mean?

Sometimes, a result is neither positive nor negative. This is called an inconclusive result and can be caused by a variety of factors. It does not necessarily mean a HIV positive result on future tests. Because it is complex to explain this result is not given over the phone. Further tests will be arranged to find out what this result means.

Advantages of knowing your HIV status

- Current HIV treatments dramatically improve the duration and quality of life of people living with HIV if the infection is detected early.
- Knowledge of your HIV status may help you negotiate safe sex and/or injecting behaviour differently.

Other things to consider:

- Having an HIV antibody test can be stressful. You can discuss any concerns with a counsellor, nurse or doctor during your consultation.
- Talking about how you would manage a positive HIV result is often helpful.
- Medical information or anything discussed at the centre is confidential. At MSHC testing for HIV is always done on coded (not named) specimens.
- The Health Department receives statistics on the number of people with HIV or AIDS, but not names or addresses. Details appear in coded form only.
- There is a legal requirement for people infected with HIV to inform sexual partners, if unprotected sex is going to happen.
- Sometimes people with HIV experience discrimination, e.g. in personal relationships, housing or employment.
- Life insurance and visas for some countries can be restricted for people infected with HIV.

Getting your negative HIV result

With your permission, we will SMS your negative HIV result within seven days.

If your HIV result is either positive or inconclusive, we will call you and ask you to attend the clinic to discuss your result.

If you decide to opt out of this service, you may be asked to call to check the status of your HIV test.

We will call with other test results only if you need further treatment or follow up.

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