

# THE READER'S DIGEST VERSION: HIV TESTING

## WHO SHOULD BE TESTED?

If you have engaged in any behavior that can transmit HIV it is very important that you seek counseling and testing for HIV. Knowing your status is the first step to seeking medical attention and gaining access to effective treatment that can prolong your life and delay the onset of AIDS.

### Remember...

**Testing should never be used in place of protecting yourself from infection. Always protect yourself when engaging in behavior that could put you at risk for HIV infection.**

Testing and counseling is *especially* recommended for the following groups of people:

- People who have had unprotected anal, oral or vaginal sex.
- Pregnant women and women who plan to become pregnant.
- Sexual partners of injection drug users.
- Persons who have shared needles to inject *any* substance into their body.
- Persons who have sexually-transmitted diseases or infections
- Persons who have been sexually abused.
- Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B & Hepatitis C patients
- Patients who received blood transfusions or other blood products between 1978 and 1985.

### IMPORTANT QUESTION

*What is the incubation period of HIV infection & when does a clinician definitely say one is free from HIV, after an unprotected exposure?*

*MOST PERSONS WITH KNOWN HIV EXPOSURE SEROCONVERT [BECOME HIV POSITIVE] AFTER 3 MONTHS-- A NEGATIVE ANTIBODY TEST AT 6 MONTHS IS USUALLY SEEN AS DEFINITIVE.*

### RESPONSE FROM:



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Taken from:

<http://www.thebodypro.com/Forums/AIDS/Treatment/Current/Q209.html>

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<http://www.thebodypro.com/bios/byoung.html>

**That means that you have to wait at least 3 months, abstaining from high risk behaviors in the meantime, from the time you engaged in a behavior that may have put you at risk for HIV before testing to know if you have become positive from that exposure.**

### CONFIDENTIAL TESTING

Confidential testing involves recording the name of the person who tests positive and reporting those names confidentially to the public health authorities. In most cases, laboratory staff and, in the state of Kansas, state health department personnel will have access to your test results.

Individuals should ask who will know the results and how the record will be stored. If the HIV antibody test is confidential, a release form can be signed to have the test results sent to the individual's physician. At some centers, however, such as doctor offices or clinics, test results may become part of the individual's medical record and may be seen by health care workers, insurers, or employers.

The individual's status may become known to his/her insurance company if he/she makes a claim for health insurance benefits or applies for life insurance or disability insurance. If any health care provider proposes to test someone for HIV antibodies, the reasons and the

potential benefits should be discussed before deciding whether or not to take the test.

### ANONYMOUS HIV TESTING

Anonymous HIV testing means that no name is provided to the particular testing center. Instead of a name, the person is allocated a unique identifier code. This means that you are the only one who can tell anyone else your result.

### WHAT DO THE TEST RESULTS MEAN?

#### A POSITIVE RESULT

A positive test result means antibodies to HIV were found in your blood. It is very important that you confirm this result as soon as possible to ensure its accuracy. The onset of AIDS varies from person to person, but may take up to 10 years. Prompt medical care may delay the onset of AIDS and prevent some life threatening conditions.

#### A NEGATIVE RESULT

A negative test result means that no HIV antibodies were found in your blood. However, *there is still a possibility of being infected*, since it can take up to 6 months for your immune system to produce enough antibodies to show infection in a blood test. To be sure, you must be retested at least 6 months after you last engaged in behavior that can transmit HIV.

Your negative test result does not indicate your partner's HIV status. Infection may not occur every time there is an exposure; therefore, it is vital that your partner also be tested and you continue practicing safer sex.

### ARE THESE TEST RESULTS ACCURATE?

Generally, test results are more than 99% accurate. However, if you test positive for HIV, you should always access a confirmation test. If you need more information about confirmation testing, please contact DCAP.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I TEST POSITIVE FOR HIV?

- Practice safer sex with partners and don't share needles for any reason.

- See a doctor, even if you don't feel sick. Monitoring and appropriate medical action are the ways to slow the growth of HIV and delay the onset of AIDS.
- Seek out case management services through an AIDS service organization, such as DCAP. The case managers will be able to guide you to a number of resources that will help you manage your HIV much better.
- Stop abusing substances such as alcohol, tobacco, illegal or prescription drugs.

There are programs to help cover the costs of the medical treatment of HIV, even if you are uninsured. The AIDS Drug Assistance Program or ADAP is a federally funded program that helps people who fall within certain income guidelines access medical treatment for HIV.

For more detailed information on ADAP, go to the ADAP website at: [www.hab.hrsa.gov:80/getting.html](http://www.hab.hrsa.gov:80/getting.html)  
or visit the Kansas Department of Health and Environment website at: [http://www.kdhe.state.ks.us/hiv-std/ryan\\_white\\_care.htm#gpe](http://www.kdhe.state.ks.us/hiv-std/ryan_white_care.htm#gpe)

For more information on any of these topics, contact:



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Any of our office staff would be happy to answer additional questions. This information was adapted from "I Care...Do You?", a publication from the American Association for World Health © 2001.