

HIV Testing: What You Need to Know

Facts

What is HIV and how is it transmitted?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It passes from a person with HIV infection to an uninfected person during unprotected sex (vaginal or anal sex without a condom). HIV also passes between persons through contact with blood when sharing needles (piercing, tattooing or injecting drugs of any kind). HIV can pass from a pregnant woman to a fetus during pregnancy or birth. A mother may also pass HIV to her infant when breastfeeding.

What is an HIV test?

Tests for HIV usually measure HIV antibodies, a substance your body makes if you have HIV infection.

A positive test result

means that you have an HIV infection and that you can pass it to others.

A negative test result

means you do not have HIV infection unless, in rare instances, you were exposed to HIV so recently that an HIV test cannot detect it.

Why is an HIV test important for me?

HIV testing is a routine part of health care services. About one out of five persons living with HIV do not know they have HIV infection. Because they are not aware of this, they are not getting early treatment which can help keep them healthy. They may also be passing HIV to others without knowing it.

It is important for you to know whether or not you are infected because, if you have infection, you can obtain important medical care. You can take HIV drugs that can help increase the quality of your life and prevent complications from HIV infection.

Pregnant women with HIV infection are much less likely to pass HIV to their fetus during pregnancy or birth when they are receiving HIV drugs.

Do I have a choice?

Yes, it's your choice — you can decide whether you want an HIV test. Health care services and treatment cannot be denied if you decide not to be tested.

Who will be told if I have HIV infection?

State law permits only a very limited number of people to know if someone has HIV infection. Positive HIV test results are reported to public health officials. Strict state laws safeguard confidential information on HIV.

Who can assist someone who is recently diagnosed with HIV infection?

Your health care provider can help a person who has HIV infection in obtaining the services they may need, including assistance from the local health department.

There are community-based agencies like AIDS service organizations and other agencies that can help persons with HIV infection find services like case management, drug payment assistance, housing, legal assistance, as well as several other services.

For more information on resources in Wisconsin, contact the Wisconsin HIV/STD/Hepatitis C Information and Referral Center by calling toll free at 800-334-2437 or visiting the Information and Referral Center website at www.irc-wisconsin.org

Disclosure:

Wisconsin law requires that HIV test results can only be given to people who are authorized to have access to these results or in the limited circumstances specified in statute 252.15(3m).

The following are persons who may receive name-associated HIV test results under certain circumstances specified by Wisconsin statute 252.15(3m).

The person tested; and if the person is incapacitated, the person designated as the agent in the health care power of attorney;

The person's health care provider, including a health care provider who provides emergency care to the person tested;

An agent or employee of the tested person's health care provider who provides patient care or handles specimens of body fluids or tissues or prepares or stores patient health care records;

A blood bank, blood center or plasma center that subjects a person to a test;

A health care provider who procures, processes, distributes or uses a human body part for the purpose of ensuring medical acceptability of the donated body part;

The State Epidemiologist or his/her designee or to a local health officer or his/her designee for the purpose of communicable disease investigation or control or epidemiological surveillance;

A funeral director or to other persons who prepare a corpse for burial or other disposition; or to a person who performs or assists in an autopsy;

Health care facility staff committees or accreditation or health care services review organizations for conducting program monitoring, evaluations and reviews;

Under a court order;

A person who conducts research, if the researcher :

- Is affiliated with the tested person's health care provider, and
- Has obtained permission to perform the research from an institutional review board, and
- Provides written assurance that the information will not be released and will not identify the person tested without informed consent;

A person rendering emergency care to a victim if significantly exposed;

A coroner or medical examiner or assistant if:

- the HIV-infected status is relevant to the determination of cause of death, or
- during direct investigation the coroner, medical examiner or appointed assistant is significantly exposed to the subject;

A sheriff; jailer; keeper of a prison, jail or house of correction; for the purpose of assigning private cells;

If the test results were positive and the tested patient is now deceased, persons known by the deceased patient's physician to have had sexual contact or shared intravenous drug equipment with that patient;

A person who consents for testing an individual who is under 14 years of age, or declared incompetent by a court, or is unable to communicate because of a medical condition;

An alleged victim or victim of sexual assault, the victim or alleged victim's parent or guardian and the victim or alleged victim's healthcare provider;

To a person who is significantly exposed, as defined by state statute, through certain occupations;

To a foster parent or treatment foster parent or the operator of a group home, child caring institution or correctional facility in which a child is placed.

If the person is a prisoner, the prisoner's health care provider and medical and intake staff of the prison or jail.