



Testing for HIV

Women and HIV: A series of factsheets for women about HIV



Recently Diagnosed

The only way to know

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. Many people who have HIV do not know they have it. The only way to know if you have HIV is by having a blood test.

When a person has the HIV virus, it is said that they are HIV positive.



Treatments: The basics

I am a woman, why should I test?

Half the people living with HIV around the world are women. In Australia, there are approximately 1,500 women who are HIV positive. Some contracted HIV from their regular partner, or from a previous casual partner.



Looking after yourself

The main HIV transmission risk factors for women in Australia are:

- Having sex with someone from a country where the rate of HIV is high
- Sharing needles and injecting equipment.



Pregnancy and me

HIV is transmitted (passed on) through:

- Unprotected sex (sex without a condom) with someone who is HIV positive
- Sharing needles and injecting equipment



NSW Services & Websites

- Mother to child through pregnancy, at birth or from breastfeeding
- Blood transfusions in some countries. In Australia donated blood has been tested for HIV since 1985.

If you think you could be at risk of having HIV, think about having a test. If you find out that you are HIV positive, you will be able to take better care of your health. HIV can be controlled with treatments and most people can live healthy and active lives. If you are pregnant or planning to have a baby, there are effective ways to reduce the risk of passing HIV to your baby.

About the test

The HIV test is a blood test that looks for HIV antibodies in your blood. Antibodies are produced by your immune system when you have an infection or virus. If the test comes back positive, the doctor will ask for another test to confirm the result.

It can take up to 12 weeks for the body to produce antibodies. This is called the 'window period'. It means that if you have been infected recently it may not show on your first test and you may have to repeat it after three months.

Where can I get a test?

You can request a test from a family doctor, a Family Planning NSW Centre and in some cases at a Sexual Health Clinic.

The doctor or nurse should talk with you about the difference between HIV and AIDS, how HIV is passed on and what will happen when you get the results.

They may also ask personal questions to understand your level of risk. This is called 'Pre-test discussion'. It is also your chance to ask any questions you may have.

You do not need to decide to have a test on the day and you can take several consultations before you decide. The doctor should not do a test without your permission. It is your choice to have the test or not, and you can choose a doctor you trust.

The results will be given to you in person, whether they are positive or negative. If your results say you are HIV positive, the doctor should give you more information and details of support services, including those for women with HIV. You can call the numbers listed opposite and on the NSW Services and Websites Factsheet.

Confidentiality

The law says doctors and other health care workers in Australia have to respect your confidentiality. This means that they are not allowed to discuss your personal information with anyone unless you say they can.

Services

Also see [NSW Services and Websites factsheet](#)

Family Planning NSW

Healthline Ph:1300 658 886

NSW Sexual Health InfoLine

Freecall 1800 451 624

HIV information line

Freecall 1800 451 600

If you need an interpreter call 131 450

Further reading: follow the links or ask a support worker for a copy of these resources

Answers to the most Frequently Asked Questions about HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS Information Line

www.sesiahs.health.nsw.gov.au/albionstcentre/documents/pdfdocs/HIV_FAQ_Booklet_August_2006.pdf

I'm pregnant, do I need an HIV test?

Available in English and other languages

www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au

Testing for HIV



Women and HIV: A series of factsheets for women about HIV
Produced by FPNSW in partnership with MHAHS, ACON and HHAS
June 2009