

Giving your permission to have an HIV test

Permission to do an HIV test

Tests for HIV cannot be done without your permission. The decision to have an HIV test is voluntary. Before the test is done, make sure your doctor or health care provider has told you about the test, what the results mean and what happens after testing.

HIV tests

There are a number of tests that can be done to show if you have HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Even if someone has HIV, they may not develop AIDS for many years or even not at all. Your health care provider or counselor can provide information on these tests. These tests involve collecting and testing blood. The most common test for HIV is the HIV antibody test.

Test results for the HIV antibody test

Negative

A negative result on the test most likely means you do not have HIV. The test may not show a recent exposure or infection. If you think you have been exposed to HIV, you should have the test again. Have the test 3 months after the last possible exposure.

Positive

A positive result on the test means you have HIV and can infect or give it to others. A positive result usually takes from 3 weeks to 3 months to develop after being exposed or infected with HIV.

Not sure

Sometimes we are not sure about the test results. It is not clearly positive or negative; the final result is not yet known. Your provider or counselor will explain this result, and may ask that you give your permission for more tests.

How long before I know the results of my test?

Test results are usually available within 2 weeks. To keep the test results confidential, results are not given over the phone. Please return to the place where you were tested so that your health care provider can discuss the results with you.

Options for HIV testing

When you decide to have an HIV test, you may choose 1 of 3 options.

1. **Nominal testing:** A nominal test requires you to provide your name. If you want your test to become a part of your medical record so it can be used for your medical care, you can have a nominal test done. A nominal blood test may be done here in the hospital. You will need to sign a consent form at the hospital for this test.
2. **Non-nominal testing:** Your name is replaced by a code on the blood test form. Only you and your doctor know this code. The results are included in your medical chart. A non-nominal blood test may be done here in the hospital.
3. **Anonymous testing:** If you do not want anyone to know your test results or that you were tested, you can have a test at an anonymous test site.

Hamilton has several anonymous HIV test sites. No appointment is needed – just drop in. For more information call the Sexual Health Information Line at 905-528-5894. Your name is not recorded. The test is done with a number code only.

Confidentiality

All positive test results are reported confidentially to Public Health and Social Services. A Public Health Nurse will contact you to offer counseling and referrals to community supports. Under Ontario law, confidential HIV information can only be given to other people, such as your employer, with your permission.

Sometimes, consent is given by you to release your medical record to another doctor, hospital, insurance company or other third party. The results, either positive or negative, of your HIV test may be in the chart. The results would also be available to the person requesting the chart. This may occur if testing was done nominally or non-nominally as explained in the above options 1 or 2.

The benefits of testing

- ✓ **If your HIV test is negative, you do NOT have HIV**

Your provider or counselor will discuss with you how to protect yourself from getting infected with HIV.

✓ **If your HIV test is positive, you have HIV**

Your provider can give you medical care and treatment that can help you stay healthy and manage your HIV illness. Your provider or counselor can tell you how to prevent passing HIV to your sexual or needle sharing partners.

You can increase your chances of staying healthy by:

- eating a well-balanced, nutritious diet
- getting enough sleep
- exercising
- avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drugs
- reducing stress
- having regular check-ups

✓ **If you are a woman who has a positive HIV test**

If you are thinking about having a baby, your provider will give you information to help you learn about health care and pregnancy.

If you are pregnant, your doctor can provide the care you need and information about services and options available to you. Your provider can tell you about the:

- risks of passing HIV infection to your baby
- medication given during pregnancy that can greatly reduce the risk of passing HIV to your baby
- medical care available for babies who might be infected with HIV.

Public Health and Social Services

Your name will be sent to Public Health and Social Services if you have:

- a confirmed positive HIV test result
- a diagnosis of AIDS

Public Health and Social Services will use this information to track the infection rates of HIV and to better plan prevention, health care and other services.

Telling your partners

If you test HIV positive, your provider will talk with you about the importance and benefits of telling your sexual and needle sharing partners of their possible exposure to HIV. It is important that your partners know that they may have been exposed to HIV. They need to find out if they are infected, so that they may benefit from an early diagnosis and treatment.

Public Health and Social Services will ask you to provide the names and locating information of your partners. These partners include:

- present and past sexual partners, including spouses
- needle sharing partners whom you know.

There are options to help you in telling partners.

If you do not have a plan to tell your partners yourself, Public Health and Social Services can tell them without revealing your name. This is called anonymous notification. Please talk with a Public Health Nurse about anonymous notification.

If you do not name any partners or if a need exists to confirm information about your partners, the Public Health and Social Services will contact you.

Confidentiality of HIV test results

If you feel your confidentiality has been broken, or for more information about HIV confidentiality, call the Risk Management Office at Hamilton Health Sciences 905-521-2100, extension 75240.

This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask Infection Prevention & Control, your physician or health care worker.