HIV Testing

Los Angeles County Public Health Clinics

What is HIV?

You can't tell by looking if someone has HIV—a lot of people don't even know that they have it. People with HIV can often feel and look healthy for a long time, even years. But they can still pass it on.

This can happen if you have sex without a condom, share needles, syringes, or other drug injection equipment with someone who has HIV, or through mother to child transmission.

HIV is not passed through hugging, sweat, tears, saliva (spit), or urine (pee).

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It lives in blood, semen or pre-cum, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. To get HIV, one of these fluids from an infected person has to get inside your body.

Right now, there's no cure for HIV or AIDS. But medicines can help people stay healthy longer. Some can even lower the chance of passing HIV to other people.

With the right medicines, the amount of HIV in your body (viral load) can get so low that it does not show up on a test. It means HIV is undetectable. When HIV is undetectable it is also untransmittable and HIV can't be passed to others through sex. This is known as U = U or Undetectable = Untransmittable.

The HIV Test

During today's visit, you may be offered an HIV test.

Since a law was passed in 2008, you don't have to sign a separate consent form to get tested. If you don't want an HIV test, you have the right to say no.

The only way to know if you have HIV is to take a test. In this clinic, we use a blood test called an antibody test. It looks for the antibodies that the body makes to fight HIV. Results will be ready in a few days.

If you had sex without a condom or shared needles, syringes, or other injection equipment recently, you may be in the 'window period' when it's too soon for HIV to show up on today's test. The window period begins about 2 weeks after you were last in contact with any HIV infected fluids and ends about 3 months later.

If Your Test Result is Negative
You aren't infected with HIV, **or**
You are infected, but it's too soon for the test to show it because you're in the 'window period.'

If you're negative, get tested for HIV regularly. Ask clinic staff how often you should test. You should also talk to your doctor about taking Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), a medication that helps prevent HIV.

If you're negative, you can still get HIV in the future. You can get it any time you have sex without a condom or share injecting equipment. Also, even if you test negative, your partner could have HIV. Partners should get tested as well.

If Your Test Result is Positive
If your antibody test is positive, you are infected with HIV. Having a positive HIV test does not necessarily mean that you have AIDS.

If you're positive, tell your partner(s) so they can get tested and protect themselves. Under California law, your positive test must be reported to the County Health Officer.

We'll send you to a doctor who specializes in HIV for more tests and to talk about your care. There are lots of treatment options which help people with HIV live long lives. Ask your doctor about more information.

You may want help in dealing with your positive result. We can help you find emotional support and counseling. Also, we can help you to share your status with people close to you who may be at risk.
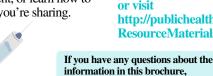
Protect Yourself and Your Partners

Limit your number of partners. The more people you have sex or share needles with, the greater your chances of getting or giving HIV.

Use condoms every time you have sex. Talk about them before having sex, and be sure that you know how to use them. Even if you and your partner both have HIV, it's important to avoid getting or giving another strain of the virus.

Use clean equipment if you inject drugs. Use new needles and other equipment, or learn how to clean them if you're sharing.

For free condoms, information, & referrals, call the STD Hotline at 1-800-758-0880 or visit http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/ResourceMaterials.htm

If you have any questions about the information in this brochure, please ask clinic staff for help.