

Useful phrases to help bring up HIV testing

All pregnant women are automatically offered a test for syphilis, hepatitis B, HIV and rubella – however, we think it's better to have this information before you get pregnant. Would you like a test?

We find that quite a lot of young men are at risk of having sexual health problems. Could I ask you a few questions to see if you are at risk?

Current advice is that everyone who has injected drugs in the past should be offered a test for HIV and Hepatitis C, because these conditions respond so well to treatment. Have you ever considered having a test?

Because you were born overseas we would like to offer a test for [sickle cell disease, thalassaemia, rubella immunity]. We usually also offer people from your region tests for [HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C]. Would that be OK?

If the patient is in a group offered screening, or a group at higher risk of HIV infection

OK, so you'd like a test for Chlamydia. Would you like an HIV test too?

So you had a negative test for HIV a year ago – is there any reason you wouldn't want another check now?

[To a patient with an STI, eg herpes or warts] I would always recommend chlamydia and HIV tests, as you may have been at risk of these infections too – and they are treatable.

[To a male patient] Because two of your partners in the last year have been male, it is possible that you are at higher risk of HIV. Have you ever considered having an HIV test?

There is a lot of HIV in your home country, I think. Do you know anyone who is affected? Have you ever had a test?

Illnesses like this are usually caused by viruses, for example glandular fever or flu. Some quite rare viruses can also be a cause, and it is important that I don't miss them if they occur. HIV is one of these. Could I ask you some questions to see if you could have been at risk in the last few weeks?

The problems that you have had recently are quite common, and usually minor. However very occasionally they can give a clue that your immune system is not working as it should...

From what you tell me, you are quite unlikely to have HIV, but I think it would be wise to do a test anyway so that we can be sure. Is that OK?

If the patient has signs and symptoms of infection

...I don't know if you are at risk of HIV, but this is one condition that can affect the immune system. Have you wondered if you could be at risk? Can I ask you some questions to check?

We are trying to do a lot more HIV testing because undiagnosed HIV can do a lot of damage, and we know the infection responds so well to treatment.

There is really quite a lot of undiagnosed HIV in this area, so we are trying to increase our testing rates, as people do much better if they know they have it.

We include an HIV test in our new patient check for everyone, because we're in a part of the country where there are higher than average levels of HIV and we wouldn't want to miss anyone. Is that OK?

As part of general holistic care and 'good doctoring'

But doctor – do you really think I need to have an HIV test?

Well, I don't think it's my job to dissuade anyone from having an HIV test at present. Currently doctors are doing too few tests, not too many. I would say: if in doubt, test.