

Frequently asked questions about HIV testing

Why do you test for HIV in this department?

We routinely perform an HIV test for people with many different kinds of health problem. This is because HIV can be a cause of some conditions, or contribute to making them worse.

There are good reasons for knowing your HIV status

If you get a negative HIV test result:

- you have the reassurance that you do not have HIV
- we do not have to worry about HIV affecting the way we treat your current condition
- you can continue to take steps to reduce your chances of contracting HIV.

If you get a positive HIV test result:

- you will have more control over who to tell, and when, than if you found out when you were ill with HIV infection
- you can take steps to avoid passing it on to your sexual partners
- there are effective treatments that will stop you getting ill with HIV-related diseases
- the earlier HIV treatment is started, the better the outcomes
- we can adjust the treatment for any other condition you have, if necessary, to make sure that treatment is most effective.

How will I get the result?

We will discuss how we give you the results of all the tests when you take them.

What does a negative result mean?

This means you DO NOT have HIV infection. However, if you have possibly been exposed to HIV infection in the past three months you will need to be tested again in a few weeks to check the result.

Why would I need to test again?

This is because it can take up to three months for HIV to show up on some blood tests, although many tests can detect it sooner than that. If you have been infected before the test is able to detect HIV, the result might not be accurate so you would need to test again to check the result of your first test.

Will my GP be informed of a negative HIV test result?

It is standard practice to inform your GP of the results of all tests carried out in hospital. This gives your GP a more complete picture of your treatment here and helps us to work better together to ensure you get the care you need.

Will having a negative HIV test result stop me getting life insurance?

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) have issued clear guidance to insurance companies that a negative HIV test result must have no bearing on any insurance applications and that they are not to ask GPs if an applicant has ever had an HIV test. GPs have been advised by both the ABI and the British Medical Association that they should not answer the question if it is asked.

Can I have written confirmation of my result?

If you need written confirmation of a negative HIV test result eg for the purposes of employment, or for travel to a country with strict controls on admitting people with HIV, this will normally be provided by your GP as for any other medical report request. You should be aware that GPs will most likely make a charge for this service.

Frequently asked questions about a positive HIV test result

What does a positive result mean?

This means you DO have HIV infection, but does NOT automatically mean you have AIDS.

What happens next?

We will refer you to be seen by a specialist HIV team within 48 hours for an initial assessment. They will do more tests to find out if you need treatment at this stage.

What about telling my family?

The general rule is that all medical information is confidential to you, so it is up to you to decide who to tell about a positive HIV test result and we will not inform anyone of the result unless you ask us to. If you want support in telling your family about your HIV status, the HIV team can advise you as they have experience in doing this.

Will my family or friends get HIV from me?

There is no risk of passing HIV to your family or other people through regular household and social contact. However, it can be passed sexually so you will have to think about protecting your sexual partner from HIV by using condoms. The HIV team can provide more information about this.

Will my partner or my children have to be tested?

The HIV team will advise you on this and will help to arrange to get your partner and/or children tested if it is necessary.

Will I have to tell my employer if I am HIV-positive?

Once again, the HIV team will be able to advise you fully on this. There is no law that requires you to tell your employer that you have HIV. However, if your employer is made aware of your HIV status through their own medical checks or because you choose to tell them, it is important to know that people with HIV are protected from discrimination at work from the point of diagnosis under the Disability Discrimination Act. For some occupations, eg in certain healthcare settings, there may be a restriction on what you can do so that the risk of passing on HIV to patients is avoided. This is specialist area and there is specialist advice available for those who are healthcare workers.

Will my GP be informed of a positive HIV test result?

If your HIV test is positive, we believe it is best to inform your GP because:

- they provide your general (non-HIV-related), out-of-hours and emergency care
- they need to know if you are taking HIV treatment so they can avoid drug interactions when prescribing other medicines

- they will know to look out for any HIV-related problems which could otherwise be missed
- they can refer you to local social, counselling and support services if you need them
- they can support your family members to deal with the diagnosis, but they will not tell anyone in your family about it unless you give them permission to do so, and will not do this without discussing it with you first.

However, it is not essential to tell your GP and some people still choose not to, particularly when they are first diagnosed and relatively well. If you have concerns about your GP knowing you have HIV, please contact the HIV team to discuss it.

What about mortgages or insurance?

Many companies provide repayment mortgages for people with a range of long-term or serious medical conditions like diabetes or cancer, and this includes HIV because of the advances in HIV treatment.

Regarding new applications for life insurance, the 2008 guidance from the Association of British Insurers (ABI) and the British Medical Association (BMA) states that "Insurers may ask whether someone has had a positive test result, or is receiving treatment for HIV/AIDS" in a medical report form and doctors are expected to answer truthfully. This does not mean that you will not be able to get any life insurance cover, but you will probably have to go to a specialist insurer, it may be more costly and the cover may be limited.

However, for someone who already has life insurance and is diagnosed with HIV, the guidance states "Existing life insurance policies will not be affected in any way by taking an HIV test, even if the result is positive. Providing that the applicant did not withhold any material facts when the life policy was taken out, life insurers will meet all valid claims whatever the cause of death, including AIDS-related diseases. Material facts the applicant might need to reveal include information about activities that increase the risk of HIV infection."

The HIV team will be able to refer you to people who provide specialist advice about these matters

How do I contact the HIV team?

You can call the following numbers to make an appointment, or for advice and support:

General appointments: _____

Clinical nurse specialist: _____

Health adviser: _____