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## Should I get tested for HIV?

(see also Question 23 “How do I get tested?”)



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You should consider getting tested if you or your partner(s) have ever:

- had sex, especially anal or vaginal intercourse, without a latex or polyurethane condom or other protective barrier
- had sex while under the influence of alcohol or drugs—you might not have used protection (see Question 6 “Are there risks of getting HIV if I drink or use drugs?”)
- shared needles or syringes (or other drug equipment like water, cotton filters, cookers, pipes, straws) to inject drugs, including steroids
- had tattooing, piercing, or acupuncture with unsterilized equipment
- had a blood transfusion or received other blood products before November 1986.

### What is an HIV test?

It is a simple blood test that detects whether or not you have HIV antibodies in your blood. These antibodies may take three to six months to appear in your blood after you are exposed to HIV—this is called the “window period.” If you are tested during the window period and the result is negative, you will have to be re-tested later to confirm the result.

In addition to the blood test, there are other types of HIV tests—oral/saliva test, urine test, rapid test and home test—but they are not widely available in Canada. Genotyping is another test that can detect the presence of HIV in your blood or determine a specific strain of HIV, but it is expensive so it is only used in urgent situations.

It usually takes 2 to 3 weeks to get the results of an HIV test.

## Why get tested?

You should get tested to find out your HIV status. If you are HIV positive you can:

- get early treatment to stay healthy
- get treatment to reduce the chances of the baby getting HIV if you are pregnant
- take precautions to not give HIV to others.
- Pre- and post-test counseling is usually available for anyone getting the HIV antibody test. Make sure to ask questions and seek support; you have the right to be well informed.

If you are HIV negative you may experience less stress and anxiety because you will know your status and you can learn more about how to reduce your risk of becoming infected

## When should I get tested?

The test for HIV detects antibodies that are produced to fight the virus. Since our bodies take three to six months to produce enough antibodies to be detectable by the test, you should get tested at least three months after the last time you put yourself at risk. It is important to practice safer sex and to not share injecting equipment whether or not you think you are infected (see Question 11 “How can I have sex more safely?” and Question 6 “Are there risks of getting HIV if you drink or use drugs?”). The 3 to 6 month period is often referred to as a “window period.” If you have been infected with the virus, you are most infectious during the window period; that means that you could infect someone else with HIV before even knowing that you are infected.

***For more information, contact your local AIDS service organization or health care practitioner.***

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For more copies of this fact sheet or other documents on HIV/AIDS, contact the Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, 400-1565 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R1  
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