

# 23

## How do I get tested for HIV?



**The Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, a program of the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA), provides information resources on HIV prevention, care and treatment as well as a range of other HIV/AIDS information.**

These resources are provided primarily to individuals and organizations working in the areas of HIV/AIDS health and education, as well as those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. We do not endorse, recommend or advocate any specific approach to HIV treatment. This material is not intended as a substitute for the advice of a health professional. Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV-related illness and the treatment in question. While we update our material regularly, users should be aware that information changes rapidly. Material obtained through the Clearinghouse may not necessarily be the most current information available. The resources could include technical inaccuracies or typographical errors. Changes are periodically added to the information herein: these changes will be incorporated into new editions of the publication. We recommend that you see your health professional for advice on specific questions relating to your health. We urge users to consult a broad range of information and/or contact us at 1-877-999-7740 for more details. Users relying on this information do so entirely at their own risk. The Clearinghouse and CPHA do not accept any responsibility for damage that may result from the use or misuse of this information.

The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of the Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, the Canadian Public Health Association or Health Canada.



*Funding for this publication was provided by Health Canada.*

You can get tested for HIV by requesting a simple blood test. To get tested, contact a public health unit, CLSC, AIDS service organization, or medical clinic. Or go to your doctor or health care provider. If you want more privacy, get tested in another community.

You have the right to pre-test counseling to help you decide whether or not to take the test.

### Anonymous Testing

Having an anonymous test means that only you will know that you took the test and what your test results were. The results from an anonymous HIV test are not reported to Public Health Units. The patient's only identification is a code or name that is assigned by clinic staff. The person having the test needs to go back to the clinic to get the results from their test. Contact an AIDS service organization to find out where you can be tested anonymously.

### Nominal Testing

Nominal tests are not anonymous because your name will appear the test forms and the test results, and the test results will be made available to your doctor or health care provider and recorded in your medical record. In some places, the test result may be reported to the public health authorities.

### Non-Nominal Testing

In the case of a Non-Nominal test a code is used instead of the patient's name. Only you and the doctor know who the code refers to.

### How can I check if the test is anonymous or confidential?

If you would like to find out how anonymous or confidential the test will be, you might want to ask the following questions before you consent to be tested:

- Will the test request form have my name on it?
- Will the test result have my name on it?
- Will the test result be recorded in my medical record?
- Will my test result be reported to the public health authorities?

### What happens before I take the test?

Before you take the test, a nurse or counselor will speak to you in private so you can ask questions. They will ask you why you want to take the test, and when and how you think you were exposed to HIV.

Remember that it is your choice to get tested. Before you are tested, you must give your consent in writing.

## **What happens during the test?**

A small sample of blood is taken from your arm and sent to a lab. If no antibodies are detected—and it has been six months since you might have been exposed to HIV- your test is “negative,” which means you do not have HIV infection. It does **not** mean you are immune to HIV infection.

If HIV antibodies are detected, a second test is done on the same sample to **confirm** the positive result. A positive test means you have HIV infection. It does **not** mean you have AIDS.

If a positive test result is found, you may be advised to inform your sexual or needle-sharing partners. If your test is positive, it is important that you find out how to access treatment and counseling services. This information should be provided to you by a nurse or doctor after you get the results, or you can contact an AIDS service organization for assistance.

## **When will I get the results?**

Probably within two to three weeks. You must go back to the test site in person to get the results (take a friend if you need support). You will be given the results in private so you can ask questions and get information and support.

## **How reliable is the test?**

Very reliable—close to 100%. If you wish, another test could be done in six months to confirm the results.

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

---

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  
☎ 877-999-7740 ☎ 613-725-1205 ✉ [aidssida@cpha.ca](mailto:aidssida@cpha.ca) [www.clearinghouse.cpha.ca](http://www.clearinghouse.cpha.ca)  
Published by the Canadian HIV/AIDS Clearinghouse, a program of the Canadian Public Health Association. Based on material originally created by the HIV/AIDS Affiliate of the Canadian Health Network in partnership with the Canadian AIDS Society and the Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange. Revised and Updated March 2002. Permission is granted for non-commercial reproduction for educational purposes.

---

**For more information on HIV/AIDS or for local services, contact:**