



Counseling and Testing

HIV Questions and Answers



Why take an HIV test?

An HIV test is free, simple, and confidential, and can help you make smart choices about your health.

What are HIV and AIDS?

- HIV is the virus that causes AIDS.
- AIDS is a late-stage disease that involves severe damage to the immune system.

How is HIV spread?

- Through blood, semen, fluid from the vagina, and breast milk.
- Having vaginal or anal sex without a condom.
- Women with HIV can pass the virus to their children before or during birth or when they breastfeed.
- Sharing needles and works when injecting drugs.
- Contact with blood from another person.

Why is it important to get tested for HIV?

- Because people can have HIV for years without symptoms, an HIV test is the only sure way to know your status.
- Many people do not find out they have HIV until they become sick. These people miss the chance to get early treatment that prevents more serious illness and keeps them feeling well.
- If you know your HIV status early you improve your chances of fighting HIV and living a longer, healthier life.

Should I get an HIV test?

You may want to think about taking an HIV test if you:

- Have had more than one sex partner.
- Have had anal or vaginal sex without a condom.
- Are a man who has sex with other men.
- Inject drugs.
- Have had a sexually transmitted disease.
- Have been diagnosed with hepatitis B or C.
- Believe that any of these things apply to your partner.

How often should I get tested?

- Every sexually active adult should get tested at least once in their life.
- If any of the things listed above apply to you, it is a good idea to get tested every year. If more than one of the things listed above apply to you, it is a good idea to get tested more often.
- Even if you have sex with only one partner, you could still be at risk for HIV, depending on what risks your partner takes.



Can anyone make me take an HIV test?

- No. It is up to you whether or not you get an HIV test.
- No one may test you for HIV without your consent.

Where can I go to get an HIV test?

- Your doctor or health care provider.
- One of the HIV testing programs across Massachusetts. These are listed at www.mass.gov/dph/resources.

Will I have to pay for the test?

- Many places in Massachusetts give free HIV tests.
- Testing is also covered by most health insurance plans.

What else should I know about HIV testing?

- There are different kinds of tests. Your doctor or other health care provider can tell you more about which test(s) they use and when the results will be ready.
- You may be asked about the last time you had sex without a condom or shared a needle. This is because some tests can find HIV infection very soon after someone has been infected but other tests cannot.
- You may also be offered tests for hepatitis, syphilis, Chlamydia, and gonorrhea. This is because these infections are passed in the same ways as HIV.

What happens if I take a test and the result is negative?

- If your test is negative, you will be asked when you last had unprotected sex or shared needles.
- If you recently had unprotected sex or shared needles, you should be re-tested in a few weeks. This is because only some HIV tests can detect very recent infections.



What happens if I take a test and the result is positive?

- If your test comes back positive, it is important to make an appointment with a health care provider as soon as possible.
- The person who gives you your test result will help you find a health care professional if you don't have one.
- The person who gives you your test result can also connect you with someone that can help notify past or present sex and needle-sharing partners about their possible HIV risks.
- In Massachusetts, you can get medical care and HIV medications even if you are unable to pay.

If I have HIV, will I definitely develop AIDS or get sick?

- No. Today there are many effective treatments for HIV.
- These treatments can help prevent serious illness, including AIDS.
- If you get care quickly, you have a good chance of living a long and healthy life.