



HIV testing at a glance

Can you test for HIV and AIDS?

You can get a test for HIV. It is not possible to test for 'AIDS' – this term refers to a very specific list of illnesses which can develop when HIV goes undiagnosed and untreated.

When should I take an HIV test?

You should get an HIV test if you think you have exposed yourself to risk – for example, if you have had unprotected sex with someone whose HIV status you do not know. However, routine HIV testing is becoming more common – for instance when you register with a GP, attend antenatal care or have a sexual health check up. In addition, it is recommended that sexually active gay and bisexual men get an HIV test at least once a year.

How soon can I get an accurate result from an HIV test?

Any time you think you have exposed yourself to the risk of HIV, you should go to your local sexual health clinic or speak to your GP. It is possible to get a reliable HIV test after 4 weeks if you get an antigen test. It is recommended that this is conducted 4 weeks after the exposure because it can take that time for HIV 'antigens' to show in the blood (this period is sometimes called the 'window period'). A confirmatory laboratory test may be recommended after 3 months.

What types of test are there?

The majority of tests take a blood sample and send it off to a laboratory but you can also get pin-prick tests. Saliva tests are also available, although these are less common. If you are worried about recent infection, we recommend you request a laboratory test.

Where can I get a test?

You can get a test at your local sexual health (or 'GUM') clinic, which you can locate here: <http://www.fpa.org.uk/findaclinic>. You should also be able to get an HIV test when you visit your GP, and they are also increasingly available in community settings. A number of pharmacies now also offer HIV testing and you can order a home-sampling kit (where you send off a sample of saliva or blood) - however, these usually incur a small cost.

How long will I have to wait for a test result?

This will depend on the test you take. For rapid (pin-prick/saliva) tests, results are available in less than 20 minutes. The results of laboratory tests are usually available within 2 weeks but can be sooner.

Where can I find out more about HIV testing?

You can find out more about HIV testing at <http://www.hivaware.org.uk/be-aware/faqs.php>