

LET'S STOP HIV TOGETHER

# Understanding Your HIV Test Results

Knowing your HIV status empowers you to take steps to keep you and your partner(s) healthy. This brochure will help you understand your HIV test results and provides tips on what you should do after receiving your results.

Learn more at: [cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether](https://www.cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether).



Ending  
the  
HIV  
Epidemic

If you recently had an HIV test or are considering getting an HIV test, here is some information you may find helpful.



## What If My Test Result Is Negative?

Great news! If your test result is negative, it means you do not have HIV, unless you had a recent exposure. If you did have a recent exposure, then ask your health care provider if you need a follow-up test.

- ◆ After exposure to HIV, it takes time for enough HIV to grow inside of you for a test to be able to detect it; this is called the “window period.”
- ◆ Depending on when you were tested for HIV, you may need another test to be sure that you were not in the window period during the first test.
- ◆ If you test again after the window period, have no possible HIV exposure during the window period, and the result comes back negative, you do not have HIV.

If you're sexually active or use needles to inject drugs, continue to take actions to prevent HIV, like taking HIV medicine (“pre-exposure prophylaxis,” or PrEP) if you're at risk.

Call your health care provider right away if you feel sick or have common HIV symptoms, such as:

- ◆ Flu-like symptoms.
- ◆ Swollen lymph nodes (swelling in the neck, groin, or armpit).
- ◆ Extreme tiredness.
- ◆ Rash.
- ◆ Sores in your mouth.

## When Do I Need Another HIV Test?

Some people should get tested more often. If you were HIV negative the last time you were tested, the test was more than 1 year ago, and you can answer yes to any of the following questions, then you should get an HIV test as soon as possible:

- ◆ Are you a man who has had sex with another man?
- ◆ Have you had sex—anal or vaginal—with a partner who has HIV?
- ◆ Have you had more than one sex partner since your last HIV test?
- ◆ Have you injected drugs and shared needles, syringes, or other drug injection equipment (for example, cookers) with others?
- ◆ Have you exchanged sex for drugs or money?
- ◆ Have you been diagnosed with or treated for another sexually transmitted disease (STD)?
- ◆ Have you been diagnosed with or treated for hepatitis or tuberculosis?
- ◆ Have you had sex with someone who could answer yes to any of the above questions or someone whose sexual history you don't know?

You should be tested at least once a year if you keep doing any of these things. Sexually active gay and bisexual men may benefit from more frequent testing (for example, every 3 to 6 months).

CDC's HIV Risk Reduction Tool shows the HIV risk of various sexual activities when one partner has HIV and the other doesn't. It also provides tailored information to help understand your risk for getting HIV and how to reduce it. To access the tool, visit: [hivrisk.cdc.gov](http://hivrisk.cdc.gov).



## What Steps Can I Take to Prevent Getting HIV?

You should continue to take care of yourself, even if you do not have HIV.

- ◆ See your health care provider regularly.
- ◆ Discuss your HIV risk behaviors honestly with your health care provider.
- ◆ Your health care provider can provide information on steps you can take to lower your risk of getting HIV and direct you to HIV prevention counseling services.
- ◆ If you are sexually active, get tested for other STDs and have your partner get tested too. Having another STD increases the chances of getting or transmitting HIV.
- ◆ Use condoms the right way every time you have sex. Condoms can protect against other STDs.
- ◆ Consider taking PrEP, a medication that can help you stay HIV negative, even if your partner might have HIV.
- ◆ If you inject drugs, the best way to protect yourself is to stop injecting drugs. If you continue to inject drugs, use new, sterile needles and other tools every time and never share them. To learn more about lowering your risk of getting HIV if you inject drugs, visit: [cdc.gov/hiv/basics/hiv-transmission/injection-drug-use.html](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/hiv-transmission/injection-drug-use.html).

- ♦ Call your health care provider immediately if you think you may have been exposed to HIV and ask them about medicine that may help prevent HIV infection within 72 hours of exposure (called “post-exposure prophylaxis,” or PEP).
- ♦ If your partner has HIV, encourage them to stay on treatment. People with HIV who take their medicine as prescribed and maintain an undetectable viral load have **effectively no risk** of transmitting HIV to their HIV-negative sexual partners.

## If I Get a Negative Result, Does That Mean My Partner Is Also HIV Negative?

No. Your HIV test result reveals only **your** HIV status.

- ♦ HIV is not necessarily transmitted every time you have sex or share needles, syringes, or other drug injection equipment. And the risk of getting HIV varies depending on the type of exposure or behavior. It is important to remember that taking an HIV test is not a way to find out if your partner has HIV.
- ♦ It’s important to be open with your partners and ask them to tell you their HIV status. But keep in mind that your partners may not know or may be wrong about their status, and some may not tell you if they have HIV, even if they are aware of their status.
- ♦ Consider getting tested together so you can both know your HIV status and take steps to keep yourselves healthy.



## What If My Test Result Is Positive?

This isn't the result you wanted. You may feel overwhelmed and worried, but don't panic.

- ◆ If you use any type of antibody test and have a positive result, you will need another (follow-up) test to confirm your results.
- ◆ If you test in a community testing program or take a self-test, and it's positive, you should go to a health care provider to get follow-up testing.
- ◆ If your test is done in a health care setting or a lab, and it's positive, the lab will conduct the follow-up testing.

If your follow-up test is also positive, it means you have HIV (or are HIV positive).

For information on how you can find HIV prevention services, resources, and health care providers, visit: [cdc.gov/hiv/basics/hiv-testing/finding-tests.html](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/hiv-testing/finding-tests.html).

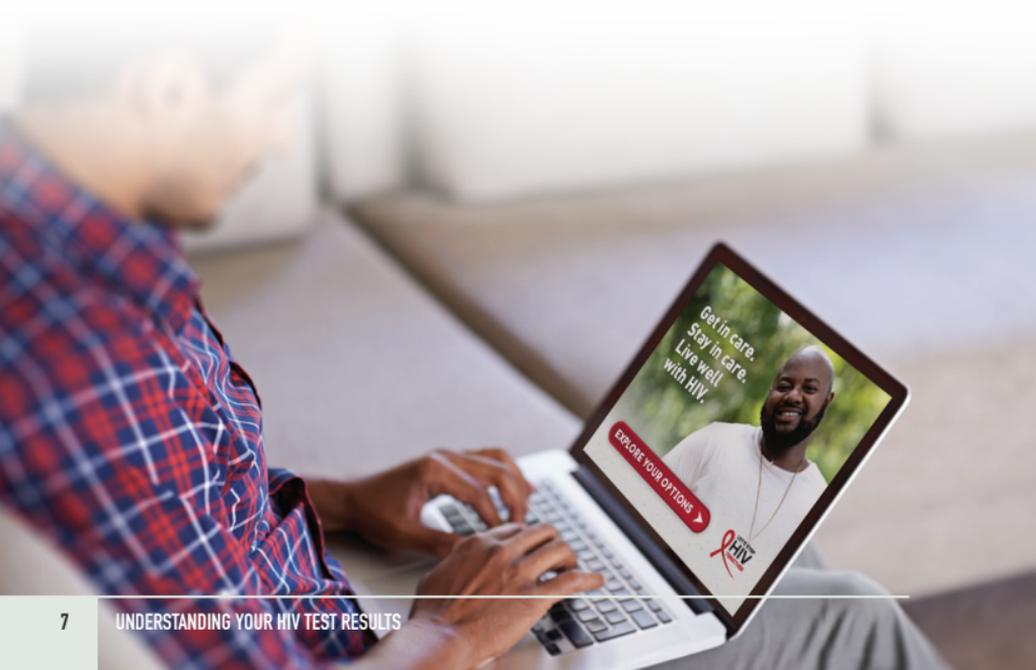
## If I Test Positive For HIV, Does That Mean I Have AIDS?

No. Testing positive for HIV does not mean you have AIDS. AIDS is the most advanced stage of HIV disease. HIV can lead to AIDS if a person does not get treatment or take care of their health. But if a person with HIV takes their HIV medicine as prescribed, they may stay healthy for many years and may never be diagnosed with AIDS.

To learn more about AIDS, visit: [cdc.gov/hiv/basics/livingwithhiv](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/livingwithhiv).

## You are not alone!

CDC's **Let's Stop HIV Together** campaign shares inspiring stories of people like you who are living successfully with HIV throughout the United States. To learn how staying on treatment can help you live a longer, healthier life, visit: [cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether/treatment](https://www.cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether/treatment).



## Will Other People Know My Test Result?

HIV tests may be “anonymous” or “confidential,” depending on the reporting requirements in the state where you are tested.

- ◆ If you take an anonymous test, your name will not appear on the test results, and only you will see them.
- ◆ If you take a confidential test, your test results will go in your medical record like any other medical test results (for example, blood pressure or cholesterol) and may be shared with your primary health care provider and health insurance company.
  - Otherwise, your HIV test results are protected by the same privacy laws that protect the rest of your health information.
  - In other words, your information remains private and confidential.

## Should I Talk to My Partner About My Positive Test Result?

You should tell any sex partners and anyone with whom you share needles or injection equipment that you have HIV, even if you're uncomfortable talking about it.

Communicating with each other about your HIV test result means you can take steps to protect both of you.



## How Does HIV Affect My Health?

HIV damages the body's ability to fight infections. It destroys CD4 cells, which are important infection-fighting cells in the body.

It is important that you start medical care and begin HIV treatment as soon as you are diagnosed with HIV. Antiretroviral therapy (taking medicine to treat HIV infection) is recommended for all people with HIV, regardless of how long they've had the virus or how healthy they are.

- ◆ HIV medicine works by lowering the amount of virus in your body to very low levels. HIV medicine can make the viral load so low that a test can't detect it. This is called an undetectable viral load.
- ◆ HIV medicine slows the progression of HIV and helps protect your immune system. If you take HIV medicine as prescribed and get and keep an undetectable viral load, you can stay healthy for many years.
- ◆ Having an undetectable viral load also helps prevent transmitting the virus to others. For example, if you have an undetectable viral load, you have **effectively no risk** of transmitting HIV to an HIV-negative partner through sex.

Receiving a diagnosis of HIV can be life changing. People can feel many emotions—sadness, hopelessness, or anger. Allied health care providers and social service providers, often available at your health care provider's office, will have the tools to help you work through the early stages of your diagnosis and begin to manage your HIV.

Your health care provider will help:

- ◆ Decide which HIV medicines you should take based on how well your CD4 cells are working and how fast HIV is growing in your body.
- ◆ Assess your overall health and whether you have other diseases that need to be treated along with HIV.
- ◆ For more information on HIV treatment, visit: [cdc.gov/hiv/basics/livingwithHIV](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/livingwithHIV).

## Resources

For additional resources and information, call or visit CDC-INFO: 800-232-4636; TTY: 888-232-6348 English/español; [cdc.gov/cdc-info](https://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info).

To find an HIV testing site, text your ZIP code to KNOWIT (566948).

For additional information about HIV, HIV testing, and HIV prevention, visit: [cdc.gov/hiv](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv).

To learn more about HIV testing and to find free, fast, and confidential HIV testing near you, visit: [cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether/testing](https://www.cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether/testing).

To learn more about safe sex, PrEP, and HIV testing for gay and bisexual men, visit: [cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether/prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether/prevention).

To learn the basics about PEP and if it's right for you, visit: [cdc.gov/hiv/basics/pep.html](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/pep.html).

To access services for people at risk for or living with HIV, visit: [hiv.gov](https://www.hiv.gov).

For more information on clinical guidelines for HIV treatment and a list of all US Food and Drug Administration-approved HIV medications, visit: [hivinfo.nih.gov](https://www.hivinfo.nih.gov).

You can also access this information by calling CDC-INFO at **800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)**.

LEARN MORE AT  
[CDC.GOV/STOPHIVTOGETHER](https://www.cdc.gov/stopHIVtogether)



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