



Why Should I Take the HIV Test?

Kaiser Permanente

Think about it.

Talk about it.

Protect yourself and your partner.

It's not unreasonable to ask, "Why should I take the HIV test?" After all, you might say that you don't have any symptoms, and you haven't been involved with anyone who has HIV or AIDS. You feel healthy. So why should you take the test?

The simple answer is that HIV can be tricky. You can get infected with HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) without even knowing it. You might have sex with a partner who doesn't know that he or she has HIV. That person could pass the virus to you. Unfortunately, just because your partner doesn't know that he or she is already infected, that doesn't stop the virus from spreading. That's why it's important to play it safe. And the first step in playing it safe means that you should find out if you already have been infected with HIV. Once you know the facts, you can make the best choices for your health – and the health of your partners.

How do people get infected with HIV?

These are the most common ways that people get infected:

- Having sex (vaginal, anal, or oral) without using protection.

- Sharing needles for IV drugs, tattoos, or body piercing without cleaning or sterilizing the needle first.
- Having had a blood transfusion or artificial insemination before 1985 in the United States or in any other country at any time.

Two other common ways for people to get the virus happen when:

1. An untreated pregnant woman passes the virus to her newborn.
2. A mother passes the virus to her baby by breastfeeding.

What will the test tell me?

The HIV antibody test lets you know if you have antibodies to HIV. (Antibodies are substances your body makes to protect you against a disease.) A *negative* test result is actually a good result. It means that your body did not have to make any antibodies to HIV *at this time*. It's important to remember that you can test negative and still be infected with HIV. When you are first infected with HIV, it can take up to 6 months for your immune system to make antibodies that will show up on an HIV test. During this time, called the "window period," you can pass the virus to other people, even though your HIV test is negative.

In most cases, antibodies develop within 3 months. In very rare cases, the antibodies may not develop until 6 months later or even longer. If you want to be sure of your negative result, get tested 3 to 6 months after the last possible time you could have been

exposed to HIV. You should practice safer sex during this time, so that you can avoid possibly spreading the virus to others, or exposing yourself again.

If your test result is positive, you have developed antibodies to HIV and you are infected. This means that you can pass the virus to other people.

What if I test positive?

Your doctor or HIV test counselor at Kaiser Permanente will contact you. They will make sure that you get an appointment so you can meet with HIV specialists and go over your treatment options. Early treatment is very important to your overall health.

Currently, there is no cure for HIV. However, there are new drug therapies for people with HIV that slow the progress of the disease. Kaiser Permanente has many other resources that can help people with HIV stay as healthy as possible.

It's important to protect your sexual partners from becoming infected with HIV. Practicing safer sex and not sharing needles can reduce your risk of passing on the virus to others.

What if I'm HIV positive and pregnant?

There are drug treatments for HIV-positive pregnant women that can greatly lessen the chance of passing the virus from mother to child. Talk to your doctor right away if you are HIV positive and pregnant.



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If I test negative, can I have unprotected sex?

You may still have HIV even if you test negative for the HIV antibodies. Because of this, it's important to continue using latex condoms or dental dams (for oral sex). Because of the window period, you should wait at least 6 months after the last time you could have been exposed, and then get tested again to be sure. Afterwards, continue to protect yourself and your partners from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) by practicing safer sex.

How can I protect myself?

• *Learn about safer sex.*

Latex condoms and dental dams can help to protect you and your partner against HIV and many other STDs.

• *Don't share needles.*

If you use IV drugs, use clean needles whenever possible. If you do share needles, clean them first with bleach and water. If you get a tattoo or any body piercing, make sure the person providing the service is using new needles.

• *Talk with your partner.*

Talk openly and honestly with your partner about safer sex. Be clear about what you will and won't do sexually. Also, respect what your partner will and won't do. Decide together what is right for both of you.

Where can I get tested?

Kaiser Permanente offers *confidential* testing. This means that your test result will not be shared with anyone without your signed authorization unless required by law. Most states require that positive HIV test results be reported to the Health Department. For more information on where to get a confidential test, call the Kaiser Permanente Health Education Department that is closest to you, or the advice and appointment line for your Kaiser Permanente facility.

Most communities offer free, *anonymous* tests. This means that you don't have to give your name, and no one will know your test results except you. You can call the CDC National HIV/AIDS Hotline at 1-800-342-AIDS, or call your county Public Health Department to find the anonymous test site nearest you.

What if I'm afraid to get tested?

Whether this is your first HIV test, or whether you have been tested many times before, it is normal to feel nervous about taking the test. It's important to remember that it is better to know your HIV status so that you can take care of yourself and others. If you test positive, you can get medical care right away and you can protect your partners. If you test negative, you can take steps to protect yourself and stay free of HIV.

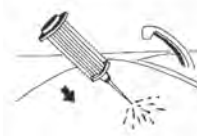
How to use condoms

1. When the penis is hard, squeeze the tip of the rolled up condom and place it on the head of the penis.
2. Hold the tip and press air out as you unroll completely. (Air bubbles can break condoms.)
3. Use adequate water-based lubrication (such as Aqua Lube, Probe, or K-Y Jelly).
4. After ejaculation ("cumming"), hold the base of the condom and pull out while the penis is still hard. Never re-use a condom.



How to clean needles

First, fill your needle with water and squirt it out. Then fill it with bleach and squirt it out. Alternate water and bleach 3 times for 30 seconds each. Make sure to end with water.



Additional resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse any brand name: any similar products may be used.