

HIV Testing

What is HIV infection?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that causes AIDS. HIV destroys blood cells in your body that protect you from infections. This hurts your immune system. You can look healthy and still have HIV. The only way to know if you have HIV infection is to do a specific HIV blood test.

How do you get HIV?

HIV is spread through:

- Contact with these body fluids:
 - Blood
 - Semen
 - Vaginal fluid
 - Breast Milk
- These activities:
 - Sex without a condom. This means oral, anal, or vaginal sex.
 - Sharing needles when shooting drugs, getting tattoos, or body piercing.
 - Blood transfusions received before 1985. Blood products are now tested for HIV.
 - Mother to baby during pregnancy, delivery, or breastfeeding.

HIV is **not spread** through casual contact such as:

- Sweat, tears, saliva, or a casual kiss from a person with HIV.
- Dishes, clothes, toilet, or other things used by someone with HIV.
- Eating food that was made by someone with HIV.

How can I get an HIV test?

An HIV test can be ordered and done as part of routine healthcare. Any time an HIV test is ordered, a discussion between the health care provider and patient must happen. The State of Wisconsin requires this discussion. You can decide and tell the provider if you want to have the HIV test. This is called giving verbal consent. If you are 14 years of age or older, you need to give your own consent. State law says that health care services or treatment cannot be denied if you do not have the HIV test.

Who will know my HIV test results?

Your test results are part of your medical record. They are confidential.

The State of Wisconsin Department of Health requires positive HIV test results be confidentially reported to them.

How are the HIV tests done?

About ½ teaspoon of blood is taken from a vein in your arm for HIV testing.

Step 1: Rapid HIV Antigen/Antibody Test

This test looks for both the p24 antigen and for antibodies to HIV in your blood.

- The p24 antigen is a piece of HIV. It can be found in early HIV infection, before the HIV antibody is found.
- Antibodies fight germs. Your body makes antibodies to fight germs, including HIV. It usually takes your body about one month to make antibodies to HIV.

Test results:

- If this test result is **non-reactive**, it means that the p24 antigen or HIV antibodies were not found your blood. There is no indication of HIV infection. Testing is complete.
- If the test result is **reactive**, it means either the p24 antigen or antibodies to HIV were found or your blood sample will be sent for the Multispot test. See step 2.

Step 2: Multispot

This test confirms the Rapid HIV Antigen/Antibody Test.

- If the test is **reactive**:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Older than 2 years old You have HIV infection. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Younger than 2 years old The HIV antibodies found could be the mother's. You will need the HIV RNA PCR test. See step 3
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- If the test result is **non-reactive or indeterminate** (unknown), you will need the HIV RNA PCR test. See step 3.

Step 3: HIV RNA PCR

The HIV RNA PCR test looks for HIV in the blood, not antibodies. Another blood sample is needed for this test.

- If this test result is **negative**, you do not have HIV infection. Testing is done.
- If the result is **positive**, you have HIV infection.

What follow-up is needed?

If the HIV test shows that you:

- **Do not have HIV infection.** If you have been involved in behaviors that put you at risk for HIV, you should have another HIV test in 1 to 2 months. Talk to your health care provider about how and when you should have another HIV test.
- **Do have HIV infection.** Your health care provider will talk with you and answer your questions about the test results. They will help you start care with the Children's Hospital HIV Program. This program offers medical care and support from HIV specialty doctors, nurses, and social workers and will help you learn how to live with HIV and find services in your community. There is always an HIV Program staff person available to talk with you.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.