

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for individuals (or their carers) who have been offered or recommended a HIV test.

What is the purpose of this leaflet?

This leaflet will give you information about why you have been offered a HIV test and answer some questions you might have.

What is HIV?

HIV stands for the human immunodeficiency virus. The virus weakens the body's immune system. This means that people find it difficult to fight off some infections and it increases the risk of some cancers.

Why have I been offered a HIV test?

A HIV test may have been recommended to you for a number of reasons including:

- Your symptoms and medical problems may be explained by HIV
- It is known that HIV infection is on the whole more likely in people with medical conditions such as hepatitis B or C, lymphoma or tuberculosis
- HIV is more common in certain groups of people. For example, people from areas of the world where HIV is common, men who have sex with men or people who have injected drugs
- As part of a screening programme where although it is unlikely that you have HIV the consequences may be very great such as if you are pregnant or if you have to have renal dialysis.

Please don't be offended if you have been offered a HIV test. HIV sometimes surprises us and it is our duty to recommend the test to a wide variety of people.

Do I have to have a test?

The test is not mandatory and you can let your doctor, nurse or worker know that you do not want it. They will ask you why and document this in your medical notes. They may ask you again at a later stage if they believe it is in your best interest to have a HIV test.

What are the benefits of having an HIV test?

If someone has HIV it is better to find out and get treatment as soon as possible. Without treatment HIV can be very serious and eventually fatal. However, with modern treatment people with HIV have a normal life expectancy and if they are virally suppressed they can't pass the virus on to sexual partners or unborn children. If someone has HIV and doesn't know, they could spread the virus to other people.

How do you do the test?

The standard screening test for HIV is a blood test. A small needle is used to take blood from your arm like most other blood tests. Only a teaspoon of blood (5ml) is required. If getting blood is very difficult you may be able to have a finger prick test (dry blood spot or point of care test).

How and when will I get the result?

The laboratory aims to make all results available within 7 working days. Your doctor or nurse will make arrangements with you about how the results will be communicated to you and when this will be. In some cases the results can be given on the same day or within 48 hours but this will depend upon the reason for doing the test. A finger prick point of care test result is available after 20 minutes. A reactive test is always confirmed with a standard blood test.

Is the result confidential?

All medical tests are confidential which means that they will not be available to anyone outside of the team that is looking after you. They will communicate it to you alone unless it was otherwise agreed previously. Your GP will have access to blood test results. HIV tests done at the sexual health clinic are anonymous which means they do not have your name on them. Your GP cannot access these results.

My HIV test is negative- what does this mean?

If you have a negative result at least 45 days after you think you were exposed you are not infected with HIV.

If your exposure was within 45 days, a repeat test will be organised. Your doctor, nurse or worker will advise you if this is the case. If there is ongoing risk that you may be exposed to HIV, you may be recommended to have a HIV test on a more regular basis.

My HIV test is positive- what does this mean?

If the test is positive then you almost certainly have HIV. The laboratory undertakes additional tests on the original sample and your doctor, nurse or worker will take more blood to confirm the result. You will be referred to our specialist HIV Team who will talk to you about your diagnosis and treatment options.

Where can I get more information?

If you would like to speak to someone in more depth about having a HIV test please contact the sexual health service. They have a lot of experience in doing tests. Telephone: 01382 425 542

The following websites also have useful information about HIV and testing.

NAM Aidsmap: www.aidsmap.com/hiv-basics

The Terrence Higgins Trust: www.tht.org.uk

For local information please visit SexualHealthTayside: www.sexualhealthtayside.org

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

If I have HIV, I don't want to know

Although HIV cannot be cured, the outcome is very good. Most people benefit from knowing their HIV status. A diagnosis means you can access the best care and support to keep you healthy. Treatment can be as little as 1 tablet a day with few side effects. People living with HIV on treatment have a normal life expectancy and if they are virally suppressed they can't pass the virus on to sexual partners or unborn children.

Knowing that your HIV test is negative can also be reassuring and help prevent further anxiety.

My doctor has already tested me for 'everything' so wouldn't they already know?

When your blood is sent to the lab, the doctor has to ask the lab to look for certain things. The laboratory will only check for HIV if they are asked to. The doctor will only ask the laboratory to test for HIV if they have asked you first. Blood tests that a doctor often requests include a blood count, liver tests, kidneys tests and sometimes other things like thyroid function or cholesterol. HIV does not show up on these tests.

I don't have any risk factors, why should I be tested?

Although the prevalence of HIV is much higher in some populations such as men who have sex with men or people from countries with high levels of HIV, the virus can affect anyone. The people most likely to present with late stage disease are those who have no traditional risk factors for HIV infection.

Will HIV testing affect my life insurance?

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) states that it is standard practice to ask about positive HIV tests. The result of a negative test should not be requested, need not be disclosed and if it is, will not affect the terms of any policy. The ABI have updated their guidance to let people living with HIV know that they can get life insurance, and that they do not need to cancel an existing policy if they become HIV positive. Further information can be found on the ABI [website](#).