

APPENDIX A:

Student Guide to HIV Antibody Testing

1. Who may wish to get tested?

People who:

- Have been sexually active since their last HIV test, or who have had anal, vaginal, or oral sex and never been tested.
- Are pregnant or have a partner who is pregnant.
- Have recently been diagnosed with another sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- Used drugs in ways that could transmit HIV, for example, using a syringe or other injection equipment that was used by someone else.
- Were born to an HIV-positive mother.

2. If there is no cure for HIV, why get tested?

- If a person has engaged in high-risk behavior but is found not to be infected, he or she can:
 - Learn how to avoid infection or reduce chances of becoming infected.
- If a person is infected with HIV, or HIV positive, he or she can:
 - Receive immediate medical care and treatment, such as antiretroviral medications, as well as other services that can help the HIV infected person live a longer, healthier life. The NYC DOHMH now recommends starting antiretroviral treatment (ART) upon diagnosis, regardless of the person's CD4 count. The recommendation is based on evidence that ART can decrease the amount of virus in a person's blood (viral load). This can improve the health of an HIV-infected person while also reducing the likelihood of transmission from that person to an uninfected partner.
 - Inform sexual partners about any exposure to HIV and the need for HIV testing.
 - Learn how to prevent transmitting HIV to others.

3. How does HIV antibody testing work?

- An EIA/ELISA test processes either blood taken from a vein or oral fluid from the mouth (not saliva but a swab of the inside cheek or gums). If the test detects antibodies to HIV, a follow-up test, such as a Western Blot, is done to confirm the results. The blood or oral fluid specimens are sent to a laboratory for processing. It may take three to ten days for someone to receive their results. In a rapid EIA/ELISA testing option, a small sample of blood or oral fluid is tested for antibodies to HIV. This technology can produce an ELISA test result in twenty minutes. A preliminary positive result must still be confirmed with a Western Blot. A negative ELISA test is very accurate, unless the person tested may have been exposed to HIV within the last 12 weeks, during the "window period."
- There is a window period from the time of infection to the time when antibodies can be detected in the blood or oral fluid. During the window period, a person with an HIV infection could have a negative HIV antibody test. This window period is usually three to twelve weeks.
- For this reason, a person who receives a negative test result can only be certain of its accuracy if he or she:
 - Repeats the HIV test three months after the most recent possible exposure, has not had unprotected anal, vaginal, or oral sex, and has not shared injecting equipment since the time of the first test.

4. Do I have to be tested if I don't want to be tested?

Starting in September 2010, New York State law requires that people ages 13-64 be offered HIV testing while seeking medical services in emergency departments, hospital inpatient settings, or outpatient primary care locations. HIV testing is a voluntary personal choice. Even if a person visits a testing site, he or she can think about the decision to test and can choose not to be tested. A medical provider cannot order or conduct an HIV test without a patient's consent.

5. Where do I go to get tested?

Many agencies and/or organizations provide HIV testing services in New York City. The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's (DOHMH) STD clinics provide rapid HIV testing free of charge. The clinics' locations can be found at: www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/std/std2.shtml, or by calling 311. To find other locations for HIV testing, call 311 or visit <http://hivtest.org/>.

6. What is the difference between anonymous and confidential testing?

- New York State law protects the confidentiality and privacy of anyone who has been tested for HIV. In New York, HIV testing is voluntary and may be either anonymous or confidential.
- In anonymous testing, the person who has come for testing does not give his or her name. The person is identified only through the use of a code number. Anonymous testing is only available at select NYC DOHMH test sites.
- In confidential testing, the counselor, personal physician or agency knows the name of the person being tested, and is bound by law to keep the test results confidential. The results are maintained in confidential medical records, and positive results are reported confidentially to the NYC DOHMH.

Although for adults no test result can be revealed to others without the person signing a release form, this is not always true for adolescents, such as youth in foster placement, incarcerated youth, etc. Their parents or guardians may sign a release form on their behalf but without their consent.

Teacher Note: On July 3, 2012, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved a rapid self-administered over-the-counter HIV test kit for individuals ages 17 and over. The test uses oral fluid to check for antibodies to HIV Type 1 and HIV Type 2. The kit can provide an HIV test result within 20 to 40 minutes. A positive result with this test does not mean that an individual is definitely infected with HIV but rather that additional testing should be done in a medical setting to confirm the test result. Additionally, a negative test result does not mean that an individual is definitely not infected with HIV, particularly when an individual may have been exposed within the previous three months. Recommendations on its use are forthcoming. For more information go to:

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<http://www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/BloodBloodProducts/ApprovedProducts/PremarketApprovalsPMAs/ucm310436.htm>