

*Early testing
and treatment
can prevent
the spread of
HIV/AIDS.*

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Testing

What is HIV?

HIV is a virus that:

- Damages the way the body protects itself against illness.
- If not treated, can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

What is AIDS?

AIDS causes the body to lose its natural protection against infection. A person with AIDS is more likely to become ill from infections and unusual types of pneumonia and cancer that healthy persons most often can fight off.

How does someone get HIV?

HIV is found in the blood and body fluid (semen and vaginal secretions) of infected persons. The virus is spread from the infected person to others:

- During sex – vaginal, anal or oral.
- While sharing needles/devices used for injecting drugs or tattooing.
- By passing the virus from an HIV-infected woman to her baby during pregnancy and birth, or by breastfeeding.

How is HIV diagnosed?

A person with HIV may look and feel healthy. Many are often unaware they have HIV and can infect others. Only an HIV test can tell if you have been exposed to the virus. If you have, your immune system makes proteins called antibodies. It takes most people up to 12 weeks after exposure before the antibodies can be detected (“window period”). But in some cases, it may take as long as 6 months.

If your test is positive for HIV antibodies, it means you are infected and can infect others. If the test is negative, it usually means you are not infected. You should, however, be tested again if, in the 6 months prior to the test, you engaged in behavior that could transmit the virus.

An HIV antibody test can be done in 1 of 2 ways:

- Blood test.
- Mouth swab.

Early testing and treatment can:

- Prolong life and keep people out of the hospital.
- Prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Where is testing done?

HIV testing is done at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. You can arrange to be tested by your own doctor. Many local health departments and community agencies offer anonymous or private counseling and testing services. For help, call the toll-free AIDS/HIV and STD Hotline at 1-800-243-2437.

How can HIV be prevented?

Never share needles or injection equipment. Practice “safe sex.”

- Use latex condoms correctly every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex. This can greatly lower your risk of infection. The only sure way to prevent HIV is not to have anal, vaginal or oral sex.
- Do not impair your judgment with drugs or alcohol.

How can I obtain more information about HIV?

Call the free and anonymous AIDS/HIV and STD Hotline at 1-800-243-2437 or TTY (hearing impaired use only) 1-800-782-0423 to learn more about:

- Your risk.
- HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) www.idph.state.il.us
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov/std/
CDC-INFO Hotline (24 hours, 7 days a week)

- 1-800-232-4636 (English and Spanish).
- 1-888-232-6348 (TTY).

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar a el departamento de representantes para pacientes al 312-926-3112.

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Developed by: HIV Center