ABOUT HIV SCREENING

Why the focus on HIV screening?
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has estimated that 25% of people living with HIV in the United States today do not know they are infected. The CDC further estimates that 80% of all new HIV transmissions occur because individuals are unaware of their HIV status. Research shows that individuals who have been screened for HIV and are aware of their HIV status make healthy decisions and healthier choices. As a result, they are more likely to maintain their own good health and protect their loved ones from infection.

Where should routine HIV screening be offered?
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that HIV screening tests be offered as a part of regular and routine visits to doctors' offices, emergency rooms, community clinics, mental health and addiction treatment facilities, student health services and STD/TB clinics, reproductive health and family planning programs, and health outreach programs.

What will an HIV screening test tell me?
An HIV screening test will let you know if you have been infected with HIV. It checks for HIV antibodies, which your body makes and uses to fight off HIV infection. The presence of HIV antibodies means you have been infected with the virus.

Can I learn my HIV status right away?
The only way to learn your HIV status is to get tested for HIV. There are different types of HIV screening tests, and they have different wait times for results.

An HIV rapid test provides a result in 20 minutes. This test involves a collection of either oral fluid (from a swab of the gums) or a small drop of blood (from your finger). Rapid-test results are quite accurate, but any positive result must be confirmed by a second test before a diagnosis can be made. It takes about a week to get the results from this second test.

You can also choose to take a conventional HIV test, which requires a wait of about a week for your results. For these tests, there are three possible sample types: 1) a blood sample from your vein; 2) an oral fluid sample from your mouth; or 3) a urine sample.

All of the HIV tests are equally accurate. All are done in a confidential manner.

What do HIV screening tests (or HIV tests) "test" for?
When a person is infected with HIV, the body's immune system produces tiny proteins, called HIV antibodies, to fight the virus. HIV screening tests check for these antibodies. They do not check for HIV itself.

What does it mean if the test is negative?

A negative result means that the test did not find any HIV antibodies.

But once a person is infected with HIV, it takes three to six months for the body to produce enough HIV antibodies for the test to "find" them. So it's possible for a newly infected person to receive a negative test result, because the body hasn't had enough time to produce a detectable amount of HIV antibodies.

For this reason, it is advisable to get a second test three to six months after receiving a negative result. A second test is the only way to know for sure that you were not infected at the time of the first test, but before your body had time to produce HIV antibodies.

If you are negative, it is important to learn how to stay that way. Ask your health care provider or HIV outreach worker to help you understand what the result means for you.

What does it mean if the test is positive—and what do I do?

A positive result means that HIV antibodies may be present in your body. This result must be confirmed by a second test, called a confirmatory test.

What does if mean if the confirmatory test is positive—and what do I do then?

If your confirmatory test comes back positive, ask your health care provider or HIV outreach worker to help you understand what the result means for you.

There is care and support for you. New treatments can help keep you healthy. It is important to see a doctor in order to discuss your options. Even if you do not feel sick, medical care and additional laboratory tests can help determine your course of action.

For more information or to obtain a current list of local testing sites, please contact us at:
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