



Patient & Family Guide
2020

Before Your HIV Test

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Avant de faire le test du VIH (FF85-2165)



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Before Your HIV Test

It is completely up to you whether you have an HIV test. The test will only be done if you agree to it. In order to make an informed decision about having this test, you must understand the following:

What is HIV?

- HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus.
- Unlike some other viruses, the human body cannot get rid of HIV. This means that once you have HIV, you will have it for life.
- There is no cure, but there are treatments that can help. Without treatment, HIV can destroy your T cells. This means that your body will no longer be able to fight off certain infections. When this happens, HIV infection leads to AIDS.

What is AIDS?

AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) happens when HIV destroys your immune system, leading to serious and life-threatening infections and cancers.

How is HIV spread?

HIV can be spread by:

- › having unprotected sex.
- › sharing needles or other drug equipment with someone who is infected with HIV.
- You may not know if your sex partners or the people you share needles or other drug equipment with have HIV.
- Your risk of infection depends on the type of activity and whether or not the people involved in the activity are infected.

What are the pros of being tested?

- In its early stages, HIV infection usually does not have any symptoms. You may have HIV and not know. Having an HIV test will tell you if you have HIV.
- If you do have HIV, you may need treatment. Knowing your status will also help you to protect your partners.

What are the cons of being tested?

There is still some social stigma and possible discrimination against people with HIV.

How is an HIV test done?

An HIV test is done by taking blood and checking for:

- › HIV antibodies (made by your body to fight infection).
- › a protein that is made by the HIV virus during infection.

This test only checks for HIV. It does not test for AIDS.

Is the test accurate?

- It is possible to be infected and still have a negative test result. This is because your body may take up to 3 months to produce the antibodies or proteins the test checks for (called a “window period”).
- If you may have been exposed to HIV within the last 3 months, you will need to be tested again 3 months after you may have been exposed. This is to make sure your test result is still negative.

What are your questions?

Please ask. We are here to help you.

How long will it take to get my test result?

It may take 10 to 14 days for your test result to come back from the lab. Sometimes it comes back faster.

How do I get my test result?

We can give you your test result over the phone if you choose. If the result is indeterminate (unclear) or positive, we will ask you to come to the Clinic to talk about your result with you. **No matter what your result is, you are welcome to come into the Clinic if you have questions.**

What does a negative test result mean?

- **As long as you are not in the window period, a negative test means that you do not have HIV.**
- Although your test result is negative, we will review the window period with you to make sure you do not need further testing. We will also talk with you about ways to stay healthy and prevent infection in the future (such as using condoms for sex, not sharing needles or razors, etc.).

What does a positive test result mean?

- A positive result means that you have HIV infection. If you have a positive result, the Clinic doctor will talk with you about what this means. They will review:
 - › treatment options.
 - › your duty to notify your partners.
 - › ways to prevent transmission.
- We will arrange for you to meet with an infectious disease specialist to manage your HIV infection.

By law, the names of all patients with positive HIV test results must be reported to Public Health. We will do this on your behalf.

What does an indeterminate test result mean?

- When we test for HIV, we use a screening test and a confirmation test. Sometimes the screening test is positive, but the confirmation test is negative. The screening test that we use is very sensitive because we do not want to miss anyone. Sometimes, it gives a false positive result.
- If you are in the window period, we will repeat the test after 3 months to make sure it is negative.

- If you have an indeterminate test result, we will talk with you about it at your followup visit.

Who has access to my test results?

- Only you and the Clinic will have access to your test results.
- If the test is positive, Public Health will be notified.
- We also recommend sharing your results with your primary health care provider, so they are able to give you the best care possible.

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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Prepared by: HIV Clinic Staff

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.