

## **HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)**

### **HIV Information**

- HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. It is a virus that affects the immune system, and if left untreated, it can make it difficult for your body to fight infections.
- HIV is passed from person to person through blood, semen, vaginal (front hole) fluid, anal fluid, and milk. It is most often spread through condomless sex or sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs. HIV is not spread through everyday contact, such as hugging, kissing, shaking hands, coughing, sneezing, or sharing food.
- Some people experience flu-like symptoms in the first few weeks after getting HIV, such as fever, sore throat, rash, or swollen glands, while many people have no symptoms at all. Testing is the only way to know your HIV status.
- For more information about HIV, click here: [HIV Basics | CATIE - Canada's source for HIV and hepatitis C information](#)

### **Who is HIV testing recommended for?**

- HIV testing is recommended for everyone at least once in their life.
- HIV testing is specifically recommended if you have had unprotected sex, have multiple sexual partners, have had sex with someone known to have HIV, have ever had a sexually transmitted infection (like chlamydia or gonorrhea), or if you have HIV symptoms.

### **What should I expect when testing for HIV through STI Care Now?**

There are two ways to be tested for HIV through STI Care Now. You can get a self-test or a laboratory blood test.

- You can test using the INSTI® HIV self-test. The test is mailed to you in discrete packaging or picked up at a participating community organization or high school. It uses a small finger-prick blood sample and shows results in about 5 minutes. Step-by-step instructions for the test are included in the kit, and phone or email support is available if you need help. When you complete your test, you report your results on our online [STI Care Now form](#). If your result is **reactive (positive)** or **invalid**, the STI Care Now team helps you arrange confirmatory testing and connects you to care.
- You can also test for HIV through a standard laboratory blood test. If you choose this option, an STI Care Now team member contacts you to provide a blood requisition and helps book a blood collection appointment if necessary. A STI Care Now team member contacts you with the test results when they are available.

### **What is HIV PEP?**

- HIV PEP stands for human immunodeficiency virus post-exposure prophylaxis.
- HIV PEP medications are used after you have been exposed to HIV to reduce the chance of acquiring HIV.

- **PEP needs to be started within 72 hours of exposure to HIV.** The earlier it is started, the more likely it is to prevent you from getting HIV. If started, the PEP medications are taken for 28 days. Post-exposure care may also include testing for other infections and vaccine recommendations.

### **What is the HIV window period?**

- The HIV window period is the time between being infected with HIV and when a test can detect it. During this period, an HIV test can come back non-reactive (negative) even if a person has HIV. This is because it takes time for your body to produce enough antibodies for the test to detect and provide a reactive (positive) result.
- For rapid HIV self-tests, this period can be up to 3 months after the HIV exposure. For standard lab-based HIV tests, this period is shorter.
- If you had a high-risk HIV exposure in the past 3 months, a standard lab-based blood test for HIV is recommended because it is better at detecting early HIV infection than a self-test.
- If you choose to use a self-test while you are in the window period and the test result is non-reactive (negative), a follow-up test 3 months after the exposure is recommended.
- If you are worried about a recent exposure, support and testing options are available. Contact the STI Care Now patient navigator to discuss your options.

### **What is the definition of a “high-risk” exposure?**

- The STI Care Now Program defines a high-risk exposure to HIV as having condomless anal sex (giving or receiving) or vaginal/front hole sex (giving or receiving) with a person who is known to have HIV with a detectable HIV viral load or whose HIV status is unknown but is at an increased risk of HIV due to risk factors including condomless sex with multiple partners or injection drug use.

### **Chlamydia and Gonorrhea**

#### **Chlamydia and gonorrhea information**

- Chlamydia and gonorrhea are the two most common bacterial sexually transmitted infections in Canada. Both infections are curable with antibiotics.
- They spread between people through bodily fluids during sexual contact.
- For both infections, it is very common to have no symptoms at all. The infection can be passed from person to person without showing any symptoms.
- For people who do have symptoms, they may experience unusual discharge, pain when peeing or during sex, or rectal or throat discomfort.
- For more information on chlamydia and gonorrhea, click here:  
[https://policy.nshealth.ca/Site\\_Published/covid19/document\\_render.aspx?documentRender.IdType=6&documentRender.GenericField=&documentRender.Id=109866](https://policy.nshealth.ca/Site_Published/covid19/document_render.aspx?documentRender.IdType=6&documentRender.GenericField=&documentRender.Id=109866)

#### **Who is chlamydia and gonorrhea testing recommended for?**

- Chlamydia and gonorrhea testing is recommended if you had unprotected sex, have multiple sexual partners, had sex with someone known to have either infection, if you are experiencing chlamydia or gonorrhea symptoms, and if you are under 25 years old and haven't been tested in over a year. If you are having unprotected sex or have multiple partners, testing is recommended more often (every 3 to 6 months, or if you have a new partner since you were last tested).

### **What should I expect when testing for chlamydia and gonorrhea through STI Care Now?**

- Through STI Care Now, you can self-test for chlamydia and gonorrhea by urine sample and/or swabs (throat, rectal, or vaginal/front hole).
- The testing supplies are mailed to you in discrete packaging or can be picked up at a participating community organization or high-school.
- The supplies you use depend on which parts of your body are involved in sexual contact.
- You collect your specimen following the step-by-step instructions included in the kit.
- You send your tests to the laboratory using the prepaid mailing label included in the kit.
- Results are typically available within a week. If you are found to have an infection, the STI Care Now team contacts you to arrange treatment and provide support.

## **Syphilis**

### **Syphilis information**

- Syphilis is a sexually transmitted infection that is passed through direct contact with an infectious sore or rash during sexual contact.
- Syphilis is a bacterial infection and can be cured with antibiotic treatment.
- The infection starts with a painless sore where the infection entered the body, including the penis/external genitalia, vulva, or anus, or sometimes in difficult-to-see areas like the throat, or inside the vagina/front hole or rectum. The sore usually heals on its own, but the infection is still in the body and can later cause rashes or flu-like symptoms. Over time, untreated syphilis can damage the heart, brain, and other organs in a small number of people.
- Many people do not notice any symptoms at first. Testing is the only way to know if you have syphilis.
- For more information about syphilis, click here: [Syphilis: What you need to know | CATIE - Canada's source for HIV and hepatitis C information](#)

### **Who is syphilis testing recommended for?**

- Syphilis testing is recommended if you have had unprotected sex, have multiple sexual partners, have had sex with someone known to have syphilis, have ever had a sexually transmitted infection (like chlamydia or gonorrhea), or if you are experiencing syphilis symptoms.

**What should I expect when testing for syphilis through STI Care Now?**

- Through STI Care Now, you can test for syphilis through standard laboratory blood test. A STI Care Now team member contacts you to provide a blood requisition and help you book a blood test appointment if necessary. A team member contacts you with the results once they are available.