Positive HIV Antibody Test

What Does It Mean to be HIV Positive?

A positive HIV antibody test means that you are infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). HIV is the virus that causes AIDS, or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. HIV antibodies are the "chemical soldiers" that an infected person's body makes to fight the HIV infection. A positive HIV test result can be scary news, but there are things you can do to stay healthy. There are many new treatments that help keep HIV under control. To achieve the best possible results, become informed and take charge of your health.

What Can I Do to Stay Healthy?

Visit a doctor, even if you feel healthy, to discuss treatment options. It is best to find a doctor who knows about HIV and can help you understand everything about your condition. HIV/AIDS service providers in your area can help you find an HIV-experienced doctor. If you don't have health insurance and cannot afford medical care, check with the Texas Department of Health Services or your local HIV/AIDS service provider about Medicaid and other state programs that may be available to help pay for your care.

Keep track of HIV and your immune system. HIV can multiply rapidly in your body. Without treatment, HIV can make your immune system very weak and unable to fight off other infections, leading to serious, possibly life-threatening illnesses. In addition to regular medical exams, there are two special blood tests to keep track of HIV infection. They are the *viral load* test and the *T-cell* test. The viral load test measures the amount of HIV in your blood. The T-cell test (also called a CD4-cell test) measures how many infection-fighting white blood cells you have. Both of these tests are used to help decide if and when to begin treatment with medications.

Ask about testing and vaccines you may need for other infections. Because HIV damages your immune system, any other infection could be more serious and require more aggressive treatment. You will need to be tested for tuberculosis (TB), which can be deadly in combination with HIV. Ask for the Mantoux (man-too) TB skin test and ask if you need a chest x-ray. You should consider getting tested for other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). You may also need to get vaccines to prevent other infections such as the flu and hepatitis A and B.

Women need regular Pap smears and gynecological exams. Pap smears can prevent cervical cancer by catching it early. Women who are HIV positive can also have recurrent problems such as yeast infections and pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).

Find out about services for people with HIV infection in your area. Many agencies provide free or low cost medical and social services for people who are HIV positive. A free, statewide listing of agencies and other resources is available online at www.dshs.state.tx.us/hivstd/services/. You can also find out which agencies serve your area by calling 2-1-1.

What about my sex partners?

It is very important that your sex partners be told they may have been exposed to HIV. Anyone you've shared a needle with needs to know, too. You can tell them yourself, or you can have the health department do it. **If you choose to have the health department do it, they will not use your name, age, gender, address, or identify you in any other way.**

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What about pregnancy and HIV?

If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, **there are medicines you can take to keep your baby from getting HIV during pregnancy.** Talk with your doctor as soon as possible about treatment options for yourself and your baby. Because HIV can also be passed from mother to child through breast milk, **mothers with HIV should not breastfeed their babies.** In the United States and other countries where clean water is available, baby formula should be used instead.

What are other ways I can take care of myself?

Eat a healthy diet. Ask your doctor about a food plan that's right for you. You should also be careful about sanitation when cooking food. Always wash fruits and vegetables to avoid bacteria. Only drink milk and other dairy products that have been pasteurized. When you eat meat or poultry, be sure it's "well done." Don't eat meat that is pink on the inside. Avoid eating raw eggs, raw fish (sushi) and raw shellfish like clams and oysters.

Stop or reduce your use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Drug treatment programs are available for people who want to stop using. But if you don't stop, don't share needles and other equipment to shoot drugs.

Have a good support network. Friends or family members can go a long way toward keeping you in good mental and physical health. Working with a counselor, support group, or clergy member may also help.

How can I help stop the spread of HIV?

The surest ways to avoid spreading HIV are not having sex and not sharing needles. If you choose to have sex, using condoms consistently and correctly provides good protection against HIV and other STDs. And if you must share needles and other equipment to shoot drugs, learn how to clean your works with bleach and water. Talk to a counselor about what will work best for you. People who have HIV may not donate blood, plasma, body organs, breast milk, or sperm.

REMEMBER: You are not alone.

HIV has affected many people, and there are agencies ready to help you. Take your time and learn about all your options. To find an HIV/AIDS agency in your area, call 2-1-1. This is a free call, and you don't have to give your name.

For HIV/STD testing locations in Texas, call: 2-1-1

For other HIV/STD questions, call:
1 (800) CDC-INFO (English/Español)
1 (888) 232-6348 (TTY)

For more information, go to: www.dshs.state.tx.us/hivstd

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