

Are You Positive You're Negative?

**[Myths] and [Truths]
About HIV Testing**



www.amfar.org

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[myth] I don't need an HIV test. There's no way I could be infected.

[truth] What you don't know can hurt you... and those you care about.

A quarter of people in the U.S. who are HIV positive do not know it, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This represents more than 250,000 people. Moreover, it is estimated that the majority of new HIV infections are passed on by people who don't know that they themselves are infected. Anyone who has had unprotected sex with someone who is HIV positive (or of unknown status), shared a needle (for piercings, tattoos or drugs) or had other body fluid to blood contact is at risk for HIV infection...and for spreading the disease to others.

[myth] AIDS is over in America. It's only a problem in other countries.

[truth] Every day, more than 100 Americans become HIV positive.

The HIV epidemic continues to rage in the U.S. More than 40,000 Americans are newly infected every year — that's an average of more than 100 new infections every single day. More than a million Americans are living with HIV/AIDS. What's more shocking is that, 26 years into the epidemic, 10 percent of adult Americans say they don't know how, or aren't sure if they know how, to prevent the transmission of HIV.

[myth] I can tell if someone is HIV positive by looking at them.

[truth] People can be infected with HIV for more than 10 years without showing signs or symptoms.

Even if a partner looks healthy, it is important to know his or her HIV status.

[myth] I'm monogamous so I don't need to be tested.

[truth] Unless you are 100% sure that both you and your partner are HIV negative, monogamy is no guarantee.

Do you really know the intimate history of all your past partners? If you are HIV negative, being in a monogamous, long-term relationship with another HIV-negative person virtually eliminates the risk of contracting HIV. But unless you both get tested, there's no guarantee that either of you is HIV-free.

[myth] My annual checkup includes an HIV test, doesn't it?

[truth] Only if you ask for it.

Almost 90 percent of Americans say they would be comfortable being tested for HIV as part of routine medical examinations. But routine blood tests—or pap tests that are part of routine gynecological exams—do not automatically include a test for HIV. The CDC, amfAR and other leading voices say they should. The CDC has issued guidelines recommending that HIV testing occur during all routine medical examinations, but not all states have implemented the new guidelines. Right now, your doctor has to ask if you would be willing to be tested for HIV.

Or you can take control and say you want it done. It's your life, your health. Go for it.

[myth] If my doctor wants me to take an HIV test, I have to.

[truth] Your doctor can't test you without your consent.

HIV tests can only be done with the consent or at the request of the patient. Some states require written consent; for others, verbal consent is sufficient (visit www.cdc.gov for the requirements in your state). Based on the new CDC guidelines, you would still be informed that your blood was being tested, but you would be able to refuse the test if you wanted to.

[myth] At my age, I don't need to worry about HIV.

[truth] HIV infection is on the rise among older Americans, too.

People over 50 are one of the fastest growing segments of the population with HIV infection, representing 15 percent of new cases according to the CDC. This has something to do with the “Viagra effect” and even more to do with a host of cultural factors and false assumptions about the sexual activity of older adults. Actual HIV infection rates among older Americans are hard to know as a result of routine misdiagnosis, under-reporting and lack of testing. In other words, HIV testing is not just for the young.

[myth] If I have surgery, of course they'll test my blood for HIV.

[truth] Not unless you ask for it.

Forty-five percent of Americans think that a person is automatically tested for HIV before having surgery. The truth is that HIV testing is still not a standard protocol for surgeries and other major medical procedures, whether scheduled or in emergency rooms.

[myth] I give blood, so I've been tested for HIV.

[truth] If you tested positive, you may not have been told.

Nearly all donated blood is tested for HIV. But not all donors who test positive are told. While it has become standard protocol for blood banks to test each and every donation for HIV, there is no legal mandate to automatically inform individual donors of positive results.

[myth] Women giving birth are routinely given an HIV test.

[truth] No, they aren't.

Fifty percent of Americans believe that women are automatically tested for HIV during prenatal exams. Under current protocols, however, an HIV test is done only if requested or agreed to by the mother-to-be. Yet all expectant women should be tested as early in pregnancy as possible. Current drugs significantly lower the chances of an infected mother passing HIV to her baby during pregnancy and birth.

[myth] If I test negative, my worries are over.

[truth] If you're having unprotected sex with a partner who is HIV positive or whose status is unknown to you, you need to get tested regularly.

It can take a few weeks or even months for HIV antibodies to reach detectable levels. And every time there's even a slight chance you've risked exposure, you need another test.

[myth] I can't live with the results.

[truth] If you're positive, you can't live without knowing. And those you love need you to get tested today.

Living and living well with HIV requires that you work closely with a healthcare provider to monitor the effects the virus is having on your body. At some point, you will need to take medications (antiretroviral drugs) that can keep the virus at bay. Many people have been living with HIV for a very long time and continue to do well with the help and support of care providers, family, and friends.

Get tested. You need to know your status.

HIV TESTING RESOURCES

amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research
www.amfar.org

CDC National AIDS Hotline
1-800-CDC-INFO
1-800-232-4636

CDC database of testing sites
www.hivtest.org

Kaiser Family Foundation fact sheet:
HIV testing in the US
www.kff.org/hivaids/6094.cfm

Kaiser Family Foundation survey report:
American public opinion on HIV testing
www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/7521.cfm

CDC revised recommendations for HIV testing
www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5514a1.htm

AIDS.org: guide to HIV testing
www.aids.org/info/testing.html

The Body:
HIV testing information, news, and research
www.thebody.com/index/testing.html

INFORMATION SOURCES

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Kaiser Family Foundation

amfAR study conducted online by Harris Interactive;
a full methodology is available.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), roughly a quarter of the 1.2 million Americans who are HIV positive do not know they are infected. This means that many are transmitting the virus to others without knowing it.

If there's even a slim chance that you may have been exposed to HIV, don't wait. Get tested. For more information on HIV and how it is transmitted, visit www.amfar.org.

[Prevention Is the Cure.]

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