

# HIV testing: what you need to know

**The testing gap**  
In 2017, a quarter of all people living with HIV in the world didn't know their HIV status. If people don't know their status, they can't start treatment or think about which prevention options are best for them.

**Only you can decide to take an HIV test**  
Any decision to take an HIV test is yours alone. No one—not doctors, partners, family members, employers or anyone else—should force you to take a test.

**No one else need know about your test or your result**  
Health-care workers are duty-bound to keep all your medical information confidential. Taking an HIV test, the test result and any discussion about the result are confidential. Only the person being tested can decide whether to share the result with anyone else.

**Let's talk about the test and the result**  
Before someone takes a test in a clinic, they will have the opportunity to talk to a counsellor in order to understand the test, the result and the implications and to discuss any worries they may have. After the test, they will get tailored advice dependent on the result and be helped to understand the options available to them.

**Testing is simple**  
An HIV test is quick and painless. A small pinprick of blood from a finger or arm or some saliva is all that is needed. Someone taking a test will usually know their result within 20 minutes, although it will be longer if the sample has to be sent to a laboratory.

**Test again**  
Anyone who is at risk of acquiring HIV should keep up to date about their status and take a regular HIV test, at least every six months for people at higher risk.

**You can test at home**  
HIV self-testing kits are available in many countries, and are becoming available in many more, so people can find out their status at any time, in the privacy of their home. A repeat test in a clinic to confirm a positive result and get linked to appropriate prevention, treatment and care is essential.

**Knowing your status always helps**  
Whether positive or negative, an HIV test can always help. People who find out their status will either be linked to treatment that can save their lives or to prevention options to keep them or their loved ones free from HIV.

**Making sure**  
A negative result means just that—the person is not HIV-positive and is not living with HIV. They can be reassured, but need to bear in mind the window period—a period of time after a person is infected with HIV but during which they won't test positive—and if they continue to be exposed to HIV should consider repeating an HIV test every 6–12 months.

A single positive HIV test result will always be followed up with a second test to confirm the result. Occasionally, the second test may not agree with the first test, in which case a repeat test is recommended after six weeks. However, if the two tests, using two different samples, are positive, then an HIV-positive diagnosis is confirmed and treatment should be started as soon as possible.

