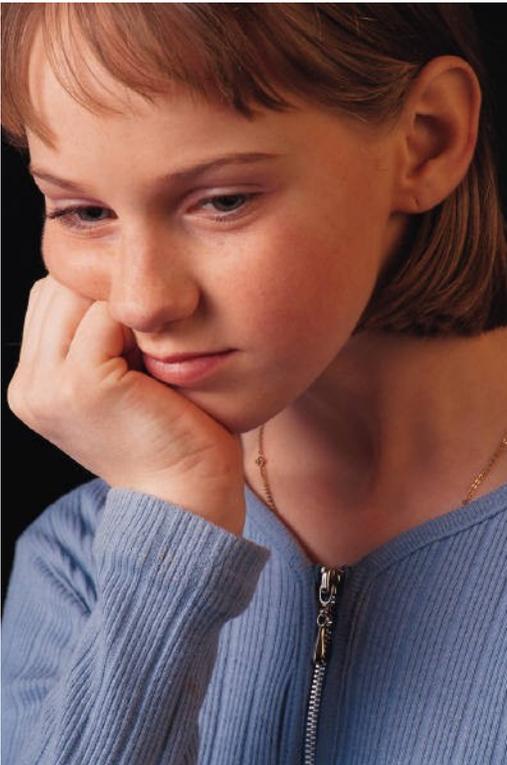


HIV TESTING KNOW THE FACTS



Who Should be Tested for HIV?

If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you may wish to be tested for HIV.

- Are you uncertain about the sexual or drug use activities of any of your sexual partners?
- Have you ever had sex without a condom with someone you know has HIV?
- Have you ever had anal intercourse without a condom?
- Have you shared needles to take drugs or other substances?
- Have you had sexually transmitted infections such as Chlamydia or Herpes?
- Did you have a blood transfusion before 1986?

HIV/AIDS Testing

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is caused by the virus called HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) HIV attacks your immune system, reducing your ability to fight infections. There are approximately 65,000 Canadians living with HIV/AIDS. There is no cure yet, but there are many medications that can help you lead a very productive life. This fact sheet can help assist you in educating yourself about testing for HIV/AIDS and where you can get tested in Nova Scotia.

Window Period

The “window period” is the time it takes for a person who has been infected with HIV to seroconvert (test positive) for HIV antibodies. Antibodies generally appear within 3 months after infection with HIV, but may take up to 6 months in rare cases.

You may have heard of other time periods. Remember despite intensive research on HIV, it is a relatively new disease, and so published information may vary.

What are HIV Antibody Tests?

As the body fights viruses, it creates antibodies to that virus. HIV antibody tests measure the presence of antibodies to HIV. They do not measure or detect the virus itself. There are 3 commonly used tests in Canada.

Why should you be tested?*

Pros

- If you know you are HIV positive, you can take advantage of immune system monitoring and early treatment and intervention.
- By taking the test, you can find out whether or not you can infect others.
- Regardless of the result,, testing often increase your commitment of overall good health habits.
- If you test negative, you may feel less anxious after testing.
- Women and their partners considering pregnancy can take advantage of treatments that potentially prevent transmission of HIV to the baby.

Cons

- If you test positive, you may show an increase in anxiety and depression.
- When testing is not strictly anonymous, you risk job and insurance discrimination. You can prevent this by ensuring that you test at an anonymous testing site.
- Whether or not to take the antibody test is an extremely personal decision. We cannot make that decision for anyone. We can only advise you of the implications of a negative result in your life. The decision is YOURS.

*Courtesy of the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia



Different Options for Testing

(The forms of testing below vary in how the test is tracked and reported.)

Anonymous Test

The name or identity of the person being tested is not required, nor is any identification or proof of medical coverage. The test is ordered using a code known only to the person being tested. If the result is positive, epidemiological data (including age, sex and risk factor for HIV infection) may be collected and reported, depending on the province where the test was carried out. Because test results are not written on the record of the person being tested, they can decide whether or not to give their name and include the HIV test result in their medical record. If and when a person who has been diagnosed as HIV positive anonymously decides to seek treatment, their status is re-recorded and becomes associated to their identity.

In Canada, anonymous testing is provided in specialized centres like sexual health clinics and AIDS Service Organizations. Anonymous testing is usually free, and because it is delivered in specialized centres. It tends to be associated to high calibre pre and post test counselling.

Nominal Test

The service provider ordering the test uses the person's full name. If the test is positive, the laboratory is required to report the result to the local medical officer of health, for data collection and partner notification. Nominal testing which is provided by family doctors, clinics and other health facilities, is available throughout the country.

Non-Nominal Test

This test is similar to the nominal test, except the test is ordered using a code or the person's initials, so only the person being tested and the health-care provider or tester know the result. If the test is positive, it is recorded in the person's medical files and reported to the local medical officer of health for data collection and partner notification. This test is available throughout the Country

Rapid HIV Testing

This test uses a drop of blood to detect the presence of HIV antibodies within approximately 60-120 seconds. The rapid test is purported to reduce the stress associate with the period spent waiting for results, it can be carried out in a broad range of locations and contexts and allows for continuity in the pre and post test counselling experience.

THERE ARE CONCERNS HOWEVER that voluntary, informed consent and counselling could be diminished in certain situations or settings. Rapid testing is unavailable in Nova Scotia and most of Canada, with the exception of a few specialized clinics and pilot projects.

Prenatal Test

In Canada prenatal testing is regulated at the provincial and territorial level and falls under two models, the "opt in" and "opt out" strategies. In 1998 Nova Scotia adopted an opt-in strategy. Under the opt-in strategy , a woman must consent to receive an HIV test specifically.

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