

HIV Testing

What is HIV? HIV is the human immunodeficiency virus - the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). You can have the virus for months or years without being sick.

Why get tested? It is important to be tested so that you can avoid infecting someone else and also because there are now medicines available that can help keep you healthy for years.

How does someone get HIV? HIV spreads through contact with blood, semen, vaginal fluids, or breast milk from infected people. This can happen with unsafe sex (anal or vaginal sex without a condom), sharing used needles and syringes, during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. In the past people got HIV from blood transfusions but that is very rare today.

You cannot get HIV from casual contact. The virus dies quickly outside the body. It is easily killed by soap and by common disinfectants like bleach. There is no risk of HIV infection from donating blood, mosquito bites, toilet seats, shaking hands, hugging, sharing eating utensils, food or objects handled by people with HIV/AIDS.

How to avoid getting infected:

- Talk with your partner. Ask if they know their HIV status. Tell them what you know about yours. If you decide to have sex, having sex with only one partner who is HIV negative and only has sex with you lowers your risk.
- For any penetrative sex such as vaginal or anal sex, condoms are highly effective at reducing the risk of HIV transmission. We would be happy to share information with you about how to use condoms correctly.
- Any sexual activity that doesn't involve exchanging body fluids like touching, dry kissing, body rubbing and mutual masturbation are safe without protection.
- Avoid injecting drugs. If a person does inject drugs it is best to use a brand new syringe each time. If new syringes are not available, proper bleaching may reduce HIV transmission. We would be happy to talk with you about how to clean syringes correctly.

About the test: At Cedar River Clinics we use a test called Oraquick on a sample of blood taken by pricking your finger. The results are available in 20-40 minutes. You will either have a negative result or a preliminary positive.

- A negative result means that no HIV antibodies were found. If you were infected only recently, there may not have been time to build up enough antibodies for the test to detect. If you think you were exposed to HIV in the past 3 months, you should be retested in 3-6 months.
- The other possible result is a preliminary positive. If you have this result, HIV antibodies may be present in your blood. You will need to have another test which takes 6-10 days to find out if you are infected.