

An HIV test can be taken at a sexual health (also known as genitourinary 'GUM') clinic.

- You may need to make an appointment for some clinics but not at others.
- At these clinics the test is free and information is kept confidential and cannot be passed on to anyone without your permission.
- Depending on the kind of test, you can get your results in as little as 20 minutes.

Find your nearest clinic at: [www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic](http://www.fpa.org.uk/Findaclinic)

- GPs also perform HIV tests. The test and its result will go on your medical records. If you are concerned who else might see your records speak to your GP about this.

## What about support?

**You should always be offered pre and post-test discussion**, so whatever the result you should receive help and advice from a trained person. If you test positive you will be told about all your options; there are treatments available which keep HIV under control and the immune system healthy.

## Are there any early symptoms of HIV?

**70 to 90% of people with HIV show some early symptoms, usually about one to two weeks after infection.** The most common symptoms are fever, rash on the chest and a severe sore throat all occurring together. This combination of symptoms is unusual in an otherwise healthy person and indicates the need for an HIV test.

These symptoms disappear after two to three weeks and someone with HIV will generally experience no further symptoms for a number of years. But it is important to remember that not everybody has symptoms, so you should still get tested if you have put yourself at risk, even if you experience no symptoms.

**This leaflet only provides the basics on HIV transmission and testing. For more detailed information visit:**

**[www.HIVaware.org.uk](http://www.HIVaware.org.uk)**

**For advice on safer sex and HIV call the National Sexual Health Helpline on 0800 567 123 at any time.**

## HIV - the UK picture

- Around 100,000 people are now living with HIV in the UK.
- Over a quarter of people with HIV are unaware they are infected.
- Between 6,000 and 7,000 people are newly diagnosed with HIV each year.

**NAT is the UK's leading charity dedicated to transforming society's response to HIV. We provide fresh thinking, expertise and practical resources. We champion the rights of people living with HIV and campaign for change.**



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**Shaping attitudes. Challenging injustice. Changing lives.**

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**KNOW THE FACTS -  
HIV TRANSMISSION  
AND TESTING**

**Know the Facts**  
HIV Transmission and Testing

**TRANSFORMING  
THE UK'S  
RESPONSE  
TO HIV**



## What is HIV?

**HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus.** It attacks the body's immune system – the body's defence against disease – so that it can no longer fight off certain infections and diseases. When someone is diagnosed as having HIV in their body they are described as being HIV positive.

## How do you get HIV?

**HIV is transmitted through semen, vaginal and anal fluid secretions, blood and breast milk.** The virus doesn't live long outside the body and requires a way into another person's bloodstream to be transmitted.

The main routes of HIV transmission are:

- **Anal or vaginal sex without a condom.** 95% of people diagnosed with HIV in the last year were infected through sex. Oral sex poses a much smaller but still identifiable risk that is increased if ejaculation in the mouth takes place and there are open sores in the mouth.
- **Sharing needles** (for tattooing, piercing or injecting drugs).
- **Sharing other drug injecting equipment** (e.g. syringes or filters).
- **From a mother to her child** during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding. With treatment and if breast feeding is avoided this risk is reduced to less than one per cent.
- **In some countries HIV may be transmitted through infected blood products.** In the UK all blood is screened to ensure this does not happen.

## HIV is not transmitted by:

- Kissing or touching
- Sitting on toilet seats
- Using swimming pools
- Spitting, coughing or sneezing
- Biting
- Coming into contact with discarded needles

## Are HIV and AIDS the same?

No. When someone is described as HIV positive, they have been diagnosed with the HIV virus in their body. A person is considered to have AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) when their immune system is so weak it can no longer fight off a range of diseases that it would normally cope with. With early treatment most people with HIV in the UK will not develop AIDS.


## Can you tell if someone is HIV positive?

Most people with HIV are living healthy lives thanks to effective treatment. You can't tell by looking at someone if they are HIV positive. In fact, over a quarter of people with HIV don't even know they have the virus. It's important not to make assumptions and always look after your sexual health and that of your partner.

## Is there a cure for HIV?

**No, but effective treatment is available which keeps HIV under control and the immune system healthy.** People on HIV treatment can live healthy, active lives, although there can be side effects. Because there is no cure, a person with HIV will have it for the rest of their lives.

## How can people protect themselves from HIV?

- **Using a condom** during sex is the best way to protect you and your partner from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Condoms should be used with care and meet the British Standard requirements and carry the Kitemark symbol:  Sexual health (GUM) clinics provide condoms for free.
- **Never share needles or injecting drug equipment** with other people.
- **Get tested** – If you have put yourself at risk, take an HIV test. Knowing your HIV status benefits you and your partner's health. **If HIV is diagnosed late, you are more likely to become seriously ill and treatment can be less effective.**

**PEP (Post Exposure Prophylaxis)** is a course of medication which may stop you from becoming HIV positive if you take it within 72 hours of possible exposure to HIV. It is available from sexual health clinics and Accident and Emergency departments under strict prescribing guidelines.

PEP has to be taken daily for a month and can cause unpleasant side effects – it is not a substitute for condom use.

**Find out more at [www.tht.org.uk/pep](http://www.tht.org.uk/pep) or call the THT helpline on 0808 802 1221.**

## What is an HIV test and where can I be tested?

To find out if you are HIV positive you must have a test. The most common test is a simple blood test but there are new tests available that use saliva. Tests have improved enormously in recent years and it is now possible to reliably detect HIV from one month after infection.