

THE HENRY J. KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION

IT'S YOUR (SEX) LIFE
Your Guide to Safe & Responsible Sex



GETTING TESTED FOR HIV

HOW THE TEST WORKS Most HIV tests detect antibodies produced by the body to fight HIV once infection has occurred but do not test for the virus itself. A positive test result means that HIV antibodies are present in the blood; in other words, a person is infected with HIV and can infect others. A negative result means that no HIV antibodies were found at the time the test was taken. In many instances this means that a person does not have HIV. However, it might also mean that they were tested too soon after infection to accurately detect HIV antibodies. It ordinarily takes three to six months (this time frame is called the "window period") for people who have been infected with HIV to develop enough antibodies for their HIV status to be accurately detected by the test.

HIV tests in the U.S. are either "anonymous" or "confidential." With anonymous HIV testing, your name is not linked to your test results—you are assigned a number that is matched to your results. With confidential HIV testing, your name is recorded with your results which may be made available to medical personnel and, in some states, the state health department.

There are several kinds of HIV tests available in the U.S. The main types of tests are:

CONVENTIONAL BLOOD TEST A blood sample is drawn by a health care provider and tested at a lab. Results are generally available within a few days to two weeks.

CONVENTIONAL ORAL FLUID TEST Conventional oral fluid test OraSure is an FDA-approved HIV oral fluid test. A sample is collected by a health care provider, who swabs the inside of the mouth. The sample is tested at a lab. Results are generally available within a few days to two weeks.

RAPID TESTS Rapid HIV tests are performed at testing sites and can provide results in as little as 10 minutes, depending on the test. If a rapid test is negative, no further testing is needed. If a rapid test is positive, it must be confirmed with a more specific test performed in a lab. Several FDA-approved rapid tests are commercially available. Some require a finger prick, others draw blood from the arm, and another can use oral fluid.

HOME TESTS A home HIV test, HomeAccess, first came onto the market in 1997. This FDA-approved test can be purchased from many drugstores and online. An individual pricks their finger with a special device, places drops of blood on a specially-treated card, and mails the card to a lab for testing. Using an identification number printed on the card, they phone for test results and may also receive counseling and referral by phone. Results can be obtained in as little as three days.

URINE TESTS Calypte is an FDA-approved urine HIV test. A urine sample is collected by a health care provider and tested at a lab. Results are generally available within a few days to two weeks.

SCHEDULING A TEST To find a testing center near you, call the Centers for Disease Control at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) or go to <http://www.hivtest.org>.

