

PROTECTIVE LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

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HIV ANTIBODY TEST

Materials provided by the Department of Health and Environmental Sciences – STATE OF MONTANA
BEFORE YOU TAKE THE HIV ANTIBODY TEST

THE HIV VIRUS

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is the virus that causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). The virus injures your immune (infection-fighting) system. If your immune system becomes so weakened by the virus that you can't fight off other diseases on your own, you have developed AIDS.

THE HIV ANTIBODY TEST

When you have an HIV infection, your body produces antibodies. The HIV antibody test is a test for those antibodies. This test is voluntary. You do not have to take the test.

A **POSITIVE TEST** means that you are infected with HIV. You can pass the virus to other people through certain behaviors. A positive test doesn't mean you have AIDS.

A **NEGATIVE TEST** means that you probably don't have HIV infection. However, because it takes time for the body to make antibodies some people may have a negative test and still be infected with the virus. If the test is done between the time the virus enters your body and the time antibodies are made, the test will be negative. You would still be able to transmit the virus to others.

Even if you have a negative test, you can still get the virus.

HOW HIV IS SPREAD

HIV is not spread by common everyday contact, but by certain risky activities. These risky activities are called RISK BEHAVIORS. These behaviors involve passing semen, vaginal secretions, and/or blood from an infected person to someone else. You can get the virus when an infected person's semen, vaginal secretions, or blood enters your body. Open sores make it easier for the virus to enter someone's body. Having sexually transmitted diseases like herpes or syphilis could cause open sores. These sexually transmitted diseases are treatable. See your doctor or nearest health department.

A woman who is carrying HIV may transmit the virus to her unborn child. She may also transmit the virus through her milk to a nursing infant.

THESE ARE RISK BEHAVIORS:

Sexual Contacts

- penis in or around vagina
- penis in or around rectum
- tongue or mouth in or around rectum
- tongue or mouth in or around vagina
- tongue or mouth on or around penis

Sharing Needles or Syringes

Perinatal

- infected mother to unborn child

NOTE: Since blood and blood products used in transfusions have been tested for HIV antibodies since 1985, the risk of getting HIV infection through a blood transfusion is extremely low. There is no risk in donating blood.

HOW YOU CAN PROTECT YOURSELF

The virus is in the semen, vaginal secretions and/or blood of an infected person. You can protect yourself by shielding yourself from these body fluids.

RISK REDUCING BEHAVIORS

(Safest listed first)

- Don't have sex (abstinence)
- Have only one sex partner (monogamy); both must be HIV free
- Use latex condoms (rubbers)
- Don't share needles or syringes
- Use clean needles or syringes

The sex act is risky. Latex condoms reduce the risk. Natural fiber condoms do not reduce the risk. Latex condoms must be used throughout the sexual activity and you must use them in the right way. Don't be afraid to ask your pre-test counselor for demonstrations. The spermicide nonoxynol-9 is also recommended, but only when used with a condom. Do not use oil-based lubricants with a condom.

If you are a person who engages in risk behaviors, do not donate blood. Avoid pregnancy until you are certain you and your partner are HIV free.

REASONS TO TAKE THE TEST

The test will tell you if you have the virus. It will allow your doctor to begin treatment sooner. New drugs can help maintain your health if you have the virus. Risk reducing behaviors can prevent the spread of HIV.

CONCERNS ABOUT TAKING THE TEST

Finding out you have an HIV infection is frightening. You may develop AIDS. You may transmit the virus to someone else. Having the virus can affect your entire life. It is important to consider who is available to talk to you about your test. This is not information to share casually.

Free and anonymous testing is available at Counseling and Testing Sites. A list of Counseling and Testing Sites is available by calling the Montana AIDS HOTLINE at 1-800-233-6668, or your nearest health department.

CONFIDENTIALITY (PRIVACY)

The professionals performing and recording this test value the necessity of keeping your test results confidential. You may be concerned about the possibility of friends, employers, neighbors or your insurance company finding out your test result. Discuss confidentiality policies with your pre-test counselor to find out under what circumstances others might have access to the result.

PARTNER NOTIFICATION

If your test is positive, sex and needle-sharing partner(s) need to be notified and given the opportunity to receive counseling and testing. This is a very sensitive task. Public health personnel can either tell your partner(s) or help you in how to tell your partner(s). By law, public health personnel cannot tell your partner(s) the time or place of possible infection or your identity.