

thinking about having an HIV test?

what to expect

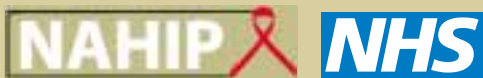


The African HIV Policy Network,
New City Cloisters
196 Old Street
London EC1V 9FR.



thinking about having an HIV test?

what to expect



The African HIV Policy Network,
New City Cloisters
196 Old Street
London EC1V 9FR.



HIV testing

What you can expect from services

Regular health and sexual health checks are a good way of being sure you are in good health. You can also get free and confidential HIV testing as part of sexual health checks, regardless of your immigration status. No one will know your test results unless you choose to tell them

Sexual health clinics, also known as Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics, specialise in treating all sexually transmitted infections like gonorrhoea, syphilis or HIV. Most large hospitals have a sexual health clinic which can be used by anyone.

You can find details of your nearest clinic by looking in the phone directory under Genito-Urinary Medicine, STD or VD or by calling one of the phone lines listed at the back of this booklet.



What can I expect from sexual health services?

You can expect:

- To get the correct information in a language you can understand.
- To make your own decision about HIV testing.
- To be given the chance to ask questions.
- To be treated with respect.
- To be given time to think about choices available to you.
- To be told the truth about your medical condition.
- To get treatments and vaccinations for sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Where can I get an HIV test?

You can get an HIV test at any Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinic. You may need to make an appointment for some clinics but not at others. At these clinics information is kept confidential and cannot be passed on to anyone outside without your permission. It is also possible to ask for HIV testing at your GP (family doctor), however this is less confidential.

What happens when I go to the GUM Clinic for an HIV test?

You will be asked to fill out a form with your name and contact details, you don't have to give your real name if you don't want to. The doctor will talk to you and decide with you which tests you need to take. If you decide to take an HIV test then you will be offered pre-test counselling, before seeing a nurse for the actual tests.

What is pre-test counselling?

This is when you speak to a health adviser or trained counsellor about your concerns or worries around HIV testing. It gives you a chance to think, consider and decide if you want to have an HIV test. You do not have to decide straight away - you can ask for time to think about the test and go back for another discussion before you decide to have or not to have an HIV test.

Pre-test counselling allows you to seriously consider:

- Why you think you might have HIV.
- What you know and understand about HIV.
- Why you feel you want an HIV test.
- What having an HIV test involves.
- Whether you need to think about any other tests.
- When you need to come back for a further discussion or your results (this varies from clinic to clinic).
- How you deal with the result, whether positive or negative.

Will I be given information about HIV?

Yes you will. If you are worried about forgetting some of the information, you might consider:

- Thinking about any questions you may have before you go for your appointment and writing them down.
- Taking a small tape recorder. You can record what the health adviser has told you, but check that this is OK with them first.
- Going with someone you trust to the appointment.

If you do not understand or speak good English, you can ask for someone who speaks good English to go with you to your appointments. Some clinics will also have a translation service but you may need to make an appointment if you need this kind of help. Leaflets, audio and videotapes should be available in a variety of languages, if you are not offered them then ask.

After you have spent time talking with the health adviser you can decide in your own time whether or not you want to have the test.

What is an HIV test and what do the results mean?

- The test itself involves taking a small sample of blood from your arm.
- The sample is sent away for testing to find out if you have or do not have HIV.
- The result will let you know if you are HIV positive or negative.
- If you are HIV positive it does not necessarily mean you have AIDS.
- If your result is negative it means that you are negative now. It does not mean that you cannot become infected in the future if you put yourself at risk

What do I do after I've had the test?

You will need to go back to the clinic for your results. You will not be given your results on the phone. When you go back you will be able to talk with the health adviser or counsellor and discuss your test result, whether it is positive or negative.

- If you are HIV negative it means you do not have HIV. You will be given information on how to remain HIV negative.
- If you are HIV positive, you will be given information on how to remain in good health and what will happen next.

At this time it is important to bear in mind that:

- You can be HIV positive and remain well for many years.
- You will be provided with information and support to help you to live well with HIV.
- You may need to make more visits to speak to the health adviser or counsellor to discuss how you feel about being HIV positive, or family or personal issues.
- You may need other tests to find out how HIV is affecting your body.
- You may need to consider taking HIV medicines depending on your health.
- If you are pregnant, you may need to prevent passing on HIV to your baby.
- You will be given the support you need to deal with your result.

Will I be judged for wanting an HIV test?

No you will not. Health workers are trained to understand the importance of HIV testing. They will not question you in an unfriendly manner. You can choose not to discuss your reasons for wanting an HIV test if you do not wish to. You should not be judged on how you got HIV or what happened if you are HIV positive.

Staff have a responsibility to support you as best as they can by providing you with correct information in a way that you can understand, so that you can make your own decisions about HIV testing.



What can I do if I feel I have been treated unfairly?

If you are not happy with how you are treated by hospital staff you can ask to speak to someone in charge first so the matter can be corrected there and then. If you are still not happy you can ask about how you can make a complaint. Most hospitals and clinics have written information explaining how to make complaints.

You can also contact the hospital or local patient representative to help you make your complaint. If you want to know your representative for making complaints about your GP and other health workers in the community, contact your local Primary Care Trust listed in the phone book or through THT Direct listed at the back of this booklet. You can also write to your Member of Parliament (MP) or local councillor.

It is worth knowing that:

- You can apply for work in the UK if you are HIV positive.
- You cannot be tested against your will or without your knowledge because you are African.
- You cannot be refused nurse training or employment as a nurse.
- You cannot be refused entry or stay in the UK because you have HIV.

For more details on these issues contact THT Direct or the African AIDS Helpline for more information.

Can I get medical care?

This will depend on your immigration status. If you have recently arrived in the UK then you will find your immigration status stamped in your passport.

- If you are a student nurse receiving a bursary, work permit holder, refugee or asylum seeker, you are entitled to free medical care regardless of how long you have lived in the UK.
- If you have been living in the UK for at least 12 months as a student or long term visitor you are entitled to free medical care (you can leave the UK temporarily, for example on holiday, as long as you are not away for more than 3 months in the 12 months preceding treatment).
- All treatment in a hospital's Accident and Emergency Department is free to everyone regardless of immigration status.
- Children take on the chargeable status of their parents, so if either parent is exempt from charges for hospital treatment, then the child will also be exempt. If both parents have to pay for treatment, then the child will also have to pay.
- Testing for HIV, and the counselling associated with the test, is free to everyone regardless of immigration status, but you may be asked to pay for further treatment if the test is positive.
- If you are a student (except student nurses) or long-term visitor who has lived in the UK for less than 12 months continuously, you may be asked to pay for any treatment that is not provided in an Accident and Emergency Department.

How can I prove I have lived in the UK longer than 12 months?

Any receipts for purchases in your name, rent records, you airline tickets, passport or travel documents can be used as proof.

Will the clinic staff tell the Home Office I have HIV?

No they will not. The only way the Home Office will know you have HIV is if you apply for special consideration to be allowed to remain in the UK because you are HIV positive and need HIV medicines and support not available in your home country.

You can contact an African HIV organisation for up-to-date information and confidential advice on:

- **Employment**
- **Immigration, and your rights to free health care**
- **Medical conditions and medicines**
- **Relationships**
- **Housing**
- **Money & welfare rights**
- **Legal issues**
- **Medical issues**

Where to go for further help:

African AIDS Helpline

0800 096 7500

Brook Helpline

0800 018 5023

Sexual Health Information Line

0800 567 123

NHS Direct

(24 hours)

0845 46 47

THT Direct

0845 1221 200

Tune into African Community Radio (ACR) on Spectrum Radio 558AM(MW) every Saturday 3-4pm for up-to-date information on services available.

www.tht.org.uk

www.loveafrica.org.uk

This information is correct at time of going to press. Regulations relating to access to care are subject to amendments by the Government.

©Terrence Higgins Trust 2004

Originally produced by the African Health Promotion team at Terrence Higgins Trust and Golden Stool Communication in association with:

Blackliners

National Institute for African Studies

HAAZ

London Ecumenical AIDS Trust

Pachedu Zenzeie and Black Health Agency

This edition produced by NAHIP Partners and the NHS.

