

Get tested!

If you're a sexually active gay man you should have an HIV test at least once a year. Here's why...



If you're a sexually active gay man (or a man who sometimes has sex with other men) it's recommended that you have an HIV test at least once a year.

Why should I get tested?

If you have HIV, knowing your status means you can access effective treatments to help keep you fit and healthy. You can also take steps to help prevent passing HIV on to your partners.

If you don't have HIV, knowing your status will give you peace of mind. You can take steps to stay that way.

One in twenty gay men in the UK - and in some places as many as one in eight - have HIV. Over one in four gay men with HIV are unaware of their infection.

Two in every five HIV positive gay men are diagnosed after the point at which treatment should have begun. This seriously increases the likelihood of a poor response to HIV drugs and ongoing ill health.

Why test at least once a year?

If you have HIV, the sooner you know the better. Testing at least once a year will ensure early diagnosis. If you're diagnosed early you can start treatment before HIV seriously damages your immune system. This means you can usually look forward to a normal life span and enjoy much better health. People with HIV who are diagnosed late are at a much higher risk of death in the short term and of developing HIV-related illnesses later in life.

Having at least a yearly HIV test is also a good habit to get into. It ensures early diagnosis even if you underestimate the risks you've taken.

What if I'm scared of having an HIV test?

Going for an HIV test can be stressful for many men. But it's worth remembering that not going won't change your HIV status – it just means you won't know what it is. If you know your HIV status, you can make informed decisions about your health and your future.

Sexual health clinics can give you advice before you test and there are lots of other places you can go for support too. For details of counselling and support services go to www.gmfa.org.uk/national and for services in London go to www.gmfa.org.uk/londonservices.

Should I test for anything else when having my HIV test?

Whenever you get an HIV test ask to be tested for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) at the same time. Getting an HIV test should be part of your regular sexual health check ups.

What if I always use a condom when fucking?

Condoms are very effective at preventing HIV transmission when used correctly and consistently, but they're not perfect. Even if you tested HIV negative some time ago and have used condoms since, you should still get tested for HIV at least annually as you may not always know (or remember) whether a condom has broken.

HIV can be passed on through body fluids including blood, semen, pre-cum and anal mucus. This means that you can get HIV from any activity that allows these bodily fluids to get into your bloodstream, such as fucking or getting fucked without a condom, or by sharing needles if you inject drugs.

What if I only suck cock?

Sucking cock without a condom is a lot less risky than unprotected fucking. You can further reduce the risk by not getting cum in your mouth. You will be more vulnerable to infections, including HIV, if you have bleeding, scratched or damaged gums, mouth ulcers or a sore throat. However, remember that other STIs, such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, herpes or syphilis, are easily transmitted by sucking cock. So even if you only suck cock you should still get a sexual health check at least annually that includes a test for HIV.

Should I test more frequently than once a year?

You should test more frequently if you:

- Have sex that puts you at risk of HIV infection (for information about risks as well as safer sex see www.gmfa.org.uk/sex)
- Have possible symptoms of recent HIV infection
- Have an STI

If you have HIV, it's always best to know as soon as possible – not just for your own health but to avoid passing it on to other people.

What are the symptoms of recent HIV infection?

More than seven out of every ten people who have recently been infected with HIV experience some symptoms. The most common symptoms of recent HIV infection are fever, rash, severe sore throat and swollen glands, all occurring together. These symptoms appear soon after infection, usually within two to six weeks. They last for a few weeks, after which they go away, usually leaving the person symptom-free for a number of years.

If you experience these symptoms after having sex that put you at risk of HIV, then you need to get tested.

PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) can stop you becoming infected with HIV. Go to a sexual health clinic or A&E if a condom breaks or you put yourself at risk. PEP must be started within 72 hours of exposure to HIV to be effective. You can find out more at www.gmfa.org.uk/pep.

Do I still need to wait three months after taking a risk before I test?

No. New tests commonly available in the UK can reliably diagnose HIV after one month. If you think you were exposed to HIV, visit a sexual health clinic right away and get advice about getting a test.

Where should I get tested?

It's your choice.

You can get an HIV test at any sexual health clinic. At these clinics the test is free and information is kept confidential and cannot be passed on to others without your permission. Most clinics these days offer rapid testing and can give results on the same day, often within 30 minutes. Where rapid testing isn't available the results are usually back within a week.

You can find your nearest clinic at www.gmfa.org.uk/clinics.

If you prefer, you can also ask your GP for an HIV test. It's free but the test result will be included on your medical record. Speak with your doctor if you are concerned about who the results will be shared with.

Some organisations provide free and confidential HIV and sexual health testing in your local community, where you often get your results on the same day. Some private clinics also offer HIV testing, where you'll have to pay.

What if I'm offered a test?

These days, gay men may be offered an HIV test in a variety of medical settings including hospitals. New testing guidelines recommend that healthcare professionals routinely offer gay men an HIV test. You may also be offered a test because you have a symptom or a condition which may indicate HIV infection. However, don't assume every blood test offered includes a test for HIV. If in doubt, ask.

What do the test results mean?

If you received a negative result, it means you don't have HIV. It's worth remembering that a negative HIV test result doesn't mean you can't get HIV in the future.

If you received a positive result, it means you have HIV. You will be offered counselling. Appropriate treatment and a healthy lifestyle can help you stay well. You can find out more about living well with HIV at www.gmfa.org.uk/positive.

Where can I get more information about testing for HIV?

You can phone the Sexual Health Helpline on **0800 567 123** (free from landlines) or THT Direct at **0845 1221 200**.

You can also visit GMFA online at www.gmfa.org.uk/sex or NAT at www.nat.org.uk.

