



# The HIV Test

Clinic 275 offers an HIV test as part of a sexual health check-up. This test is offered to everyone attending Clinic 275. When we offer the test, it does not necessarily mean that you are at high risk of having HIV.

Before the test is performed, you should be aware of the following issues. If you have any questions please ask your doctor or health adviser.

## What are HIV and AIDS?

- HIV means Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- AIDS means Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

HIV is present in the blood, semen and vaginal fluids of people who are infected. Any person who has the virus can pass it on by these fluids. A person who does not have the virus can become infected by contact with these fluids. People infected with HIV look and feel healthy most of the time. However, the virus slowly damages the person's immune system. This means they are less able to resist and recover from infections. Eventually the person will get infections or illnesses that do not usually affect people with healthy immune systems. A person has AIDS when one of these illnesses occurs. Most people do not develop AIDS until many years after infection with HIV.

## The HIV test

Before the HIV test, you should talk to a doctor or health adviser to ask any questions you may have, and again after you get the results. Blood will be taken from a vein in your arm for the test and you will be asked to return to the clinic in 7 days for the results.

The test detects HIV antibodies. These are proteins made by the immune system after

infection by HIV. Once a person has been infected with HIV, the antibodies can be found in their blood for the rest of their life.

It may take 3 months for antibodies to develop after HIV first enters the body. Before 3 months, the test may give a negative result, even though HIV is present. This 3 month period is sometimes called the window period.

This means that if you want to know if you were infected from a particular incident, you should have a test at least 3 months later.

## Preparing for the results

After listening to your history, your doctor will advise you about your risk of having HIV.

If there is some risk of a positive result, you might choose to prepare yourself for it by:

- returning to the Clinic for your results on a day when you don't have other work, educational or social commitments,
- discussing the test and the forthcoming results with someone you trust.
- planning what to do if the result is positive: deciding where to go and who to tell.
- remembering that HIV is now a treatable long-term condition, and there are many support services for people living with HIV.

## If the test result is negative

This means HIV antibodies were not detected in your blood because:

- you have not been infected with HIV
- or
- you have been infected recently and have not yet made antibodies to HIV.

You should discuss the result with your doctor or health adviser to work out which possibility applies to you.

The test may need to be repeated if you are still in the window period. It is especially important to have a further test 3 months after you are diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (eg gonorrhoea), in case you were exposed to HIV at the time you contracted the infection.

## If the test result is positive

This means you have been infected with HIV, and the virus will probably remain in your system for life.

All people who are HIV positive can infect others:

- during unsafe sex
- when sharing needles and syringes
- by blood transfusion (in Australia, blood has been tested for HIV since 1985)
- infected women can pass the virus to their babies at birth and by breast milk.

HIV is not spread by coughing, sneezing, sharing eating utensils, shaking hands, hugging or kissing.

People with HIV can stay healthy for many years. Regular medical check-ups and drug treatments can reduce the activity of HIV and prevent many AIDS-associated illnesses. In South Australia, the death rate due to AIDS has fallen significantly in the late 1990s due to new treatments.

## Issues to consider when having a test

If the test is negative, you are unlikely to be infected unless infection occurred within the past 3 months. This reassurance is of little value if you have unsafe sex or share needles after taking the test.

If the test is positive, you have acquired the infection, are infectious to others and may get

AIDS. You should take action to prevent infecting others and delay the onset of AIDS by maintaining your health.

Choosing to have a test with an experienced and supportive doctor or health worker will be less stressful than if infection is found following an accident, or after admission to hospital with an advanced HIV related illness.

The test result may encourage you to make changes that will reduce your risk of infection in the future.

You may be concerned about confidentiality. Be careful whom you tell about having the test, or the test results. Staff will not tell your results to anyone outside the clinic.

You may be concerned that the test will affect your chances of overseas travel or life insurance. Some insurance companies require an HIV test or disclosure of risk factors before accepting a policy. Some overseas embassies require an HIV test or declaration of any infectious diseases before issuing a visa. The test result may affect immigration procedures for those seeking permanent residency in Australia.

### Safer sex: preventing HIV transmission

Whether you decide to have the test or not, practising safer sex will help prevent the spread of HIV.

Practise safer sex if there is any chance either you or your partner could have HIV. It only takes one unsafe sexual contact to pass on the virus.

Safer sex means being careful not to share semen, blood or vaginal fluids. Whenever you have intercourse (vaginal or anal), use a condom. Use it with a water-based lubricant (eg KY, Glyde). Saliva is not a good lubricant.

If vaginal or anal intercourse is not important, explore other sexual activities. Oral sex is usually a low risk activity for transmitting HIV.

The doctor or health adviser can give you more information about the safety of sex practices.

Despite the best intentions, many unsafe contacts happen when drugs or alcohol affects people's judgements. If you inject drugs, use sterile equipment, don't share, and practise safe sex.

### More information

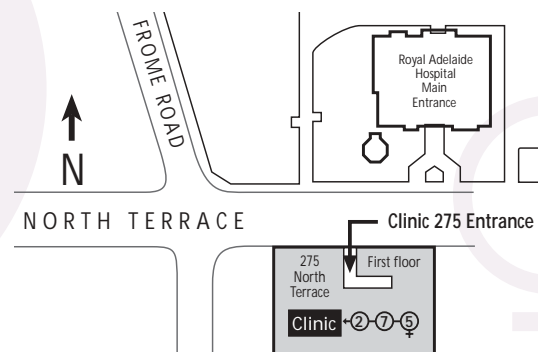
STD Services web site:  
[www.stdservices.on.net/std/hiv-aids](http://www.stdservices.on.net/std/hiv-aids)

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STD Services June 2007

## The HIV Test

### Sexually Transmitted Diseases Services

#### Royal Adelaide Hospital

Free and confidential advice, testing and treatment for all STDs including HIV/AIDS

No appointment necessary

**Monday, Thursday & Friday**

10am – 4.30pm

**Tuesday & Wednesday**

11.00am - 6.30pm

1st floor  
275 North Terrace  
Adelaide 5000

#### Telephone

08 8222 5075

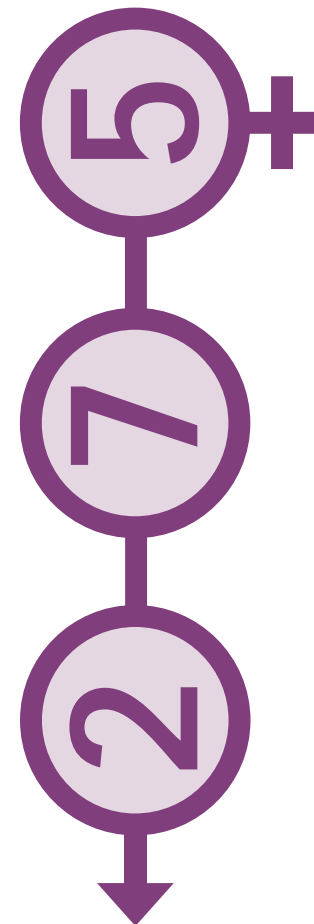
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#### web site

[www.stdservices.on.net](http://www.stdservices.on.net)



# clinic