

REGARDING HIV TESTING

This information is being provided to you before testing for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Please read this material carefully and feel free to ask any questions you have regarding this information.

THE HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS

What is HIV?

HIV stands for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, which is the virus that causes AIDS, or the Acquired Immunodeficiency Sndrome.

How is HIV Transmitted?

HIV is spread through contact with infected blood, semen or vaginal fluid. Therefore, behaviors that put a person at risk for HIV infection are vaginal and anal sex, injection drug use with shared needles, transfusion of infected blood and transmission from an infected woman to her fetus (unborn child). HIV cannot be transmitted through casual contact (hugging, handshake, kissing, sharing drinks, etc.) or by donating blood.

How Does HIV Affect the Body?

HIV infects and destroys specific cells called “T cells”, which make up part of our immune system (the body’s defense system). When HIV destroys enough of an infected person’s T cells so that their numbers drop below a

certain level that leaves the person susceptible to certain common infections and/or cancers. When these opportunistic infections or cancers occur, the person is then said to have AIDS.

HIV TESTING

The HIV Antibody test is performed on the same blood sample drawn for your other required blood tests before your physical examination. The results of HIV Antibody testing are available within several days after being drawn. If repeat or confirmation testing is necessary, more time may be needed to complete the testing.

What is “The Test” and What Are Antibodies?

The most commonly used test is the Enzyme Immuno Assay (EIA) test, designed to detect antibody to the AIDS virus. Antibodies are produced by our immune system to fight infections caused by different agents. The presence of antibody to a particular agent indicates that the agent was encountered at some point in the past and may still be present in the body. Antibodies are easily detected, a fact which provides the basis for diagnostic tests for many diseases, especially ones caused by viruses.

Why Test for Antibody?

Testing for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus itself is currently more expensive and difficult than antibody screening. Therefore, EIA screening for HIV antibodies is used to

screen all donated blood and is the first step in checking individuals for possible past exposure to HIV.

When Can Antibodies Be Detected in Blood?

Most people will develop detectable antibodies within 3 months after infection, the average being 25 days. The Pima County Health Department currently recommends testing 3 months after the last possible exposure (through sex or sharing needles). It is important to protect yourself and others from possible exposures to HIV during the 3 months between exposure and the test.

What About False Negatives?

No test is perfect and sometimes a sample that really contains antibody may not be reactive on the EIA test. This would constitute a false negative result. If the timing of the test is appropriate (in other words, 3 months or more after the last risky exposure), then the EIA test for HIV antibody is quite “sensitive,” which means that false negatives are extremely rare. This is one reason why the test is so attractive as a screening test.

What About False Positives?

Some samples that do not contain antibody to HIV may be reactive on the EIA test. Certain characteristics contribute to false positive testing, such as history of pregnancy, recent vaccination (e.g. flu vaccine) or recent viral illness. There is more chance of a positive

EIA screening test being a false positive result if the individual's actual risk of infection is low. To decrease the risks of someone being labeled positive for HIV falsely, any positive result is retested using the same blood specimen. If the second EIA test is also positive, a more specific confirmatory test, called a Western Blot, is done. If the Western Blot is also positive, then this individual is told they are HIV positive. If any test along this process comes back negative, the person is told they are HIV negative.

What if the Test is Repeatedly Positive?

A confirmed HIV antibody positive test indicates infection with HIV virus but is not a diagnosis of "AIDS." If the test is positive, an individual may transmit the virus to others by blood, sexual contact or pregnancy, and may, over time, develop AIDS.

Are Positive Tests Reported to Anyone?

Confirmed positive HIV antibody tests, as well as diagnoses of AIDS cases, are reported to the Arizona Department of Health Services. At the UA Campus Health Service, an HIV antibody test result is charted in a student's confidential medical record. This medical record cannot be released without your specific permission. In Arizona, HIV antibody testing may be required by insurance companies, for travel to certain countries, and by the military. An HIV antibody test may be reason for denial of insurance.

PREVENTION OF HIV INFECTION

How Can HIV Infection Be Prevented?

The best way to avoid being infected with HIV is to avoid behaviors that place you at risk for this infection. Sexual abstinence, monogamy with one long-term, uninfected sexual partner, avoidance of anal sex, and regular condom use are options to reduce your risk for HIV infection. Injection drug use (especially sharing needles) is another important risk behavior to avoid.

For your health and safety, not only against HIV but many other STDs as well, and for the health and safety of those you have an intimate relationship with, please consider following the precautions listed above. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask the nurse during your preliminary exam or the physician you will be seeing for your physical exam.



CAMPUS RESOURCES

Counseling & Psychological Services 621-3334

Health Promotion & Preventive Services 621-6483
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation 628-SAAF

Pima County Health Department
 - HIV Testing 791-7676
 - AIDS Education 622-1118
 CHS521 9/2001

***Pre-Test
 Information
 On the
 Human
 Immunodeficiency***

Virus
(HIV)



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