

# Why HIV testing is important for YOU!

## Why should I be tested for HIV?

- ◆ If you have HIV, your doctor can monitor the damage HIV is doing to your immune system. He or she can help you stay healthy longer AND help you decide the best time to start medical treatment.
- ◆ If you are or become pregnant, you can reduce the risk of passing HIV to your baby.
- ◆ If you know you have HIV, you can protect the person you have sex with from getting infected.
- ◆ If you have HIV, it is important to help the people you've had sex with or the people you've shared drugs with to get tested for HIV. A test counselor can also help you decide if your children need to be tested.
- ◆ Sometimes married couples have sex with people besides their spouse. If there is a possibility that your spouse has had sex with anyone besides you, whether you know for sure or not, you should get tested for HIV.
- ◆ If you had dental or medical procedures in another country, it may not have been possible to clean equipment that had some one else's blood on it before it was used on you.
- ◆ An HIV test can give you peace of mind. It is the only way you can know for sure if you have HIV.

## What is HIV?

HIV is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is the virus that causes AIDS. Over time, HIV gradually weakens the body's ability to fight disease. HIV makes it easier to get many infections and cancers that would not normally occur in a healthy person. HIV is life threatening.

## How is HIV passed from person to person?

HIV can be spread in several ways:

- ◆ Having sex without a condom
- ◆ Sharing drug injection equipment
- ◆ Blood transfusions
- ◆ Organ transplants
- ◆ Sharing razors, toothbrushes, needles for tattooing or other objects that may have blood on them.
- ◆ If a mother has HIV, it can be passed to her baby, either at birth or through breast feeding

## What is AIDS?

Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is the late stage of HIV infection. If a person has AIDS, it means that HIV has caused severe damage to the body's immune system.

## You cannot get HIV from:

- ◆ Shaking hands
- ◆ Hugging
- ◆ Kissing
- ◆ Sharing eating utensils
- ◆ Food or other things touched by people who have HIV or AIDS
- ◆ Toilet seats
- ◆ Mosquito bites

***You can have HIV and not have any symptoms for many years.***

## How can HIV be prevented?

You can choose from this list the things that are right for your situation.

- ◆ Abstain from sexual activity.
- ◆ If you have anal or vaginal sex, use a latex or polyurethane condom. This helps to protect you from HIV, Hepatitis B and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- ◆ Have sex with only one person who does not have HIV and only has sex with you. If the person you have sex with has HIV, always use a condom.
- ◆ If you are pregnant and have HIV, there is medicine you can take to help protect your baby from the virus.
- ◆ Never share drug injection equipment.

## Why HIV testing is important for YOU - Continued

### What can I expect if I have an HIV Test?

Your doctor or an HIV test counselor will talk to you about the test and what will happen after the test. They will take a sample of your blood for testing. Sometimes you can get the result the same day. But normally it will take 7 to 10 days. You may have to go back to the clinic to get your test result.

Some people are very concerned about the shame that is sometimes associated with HIV and AIDS. They worry that others will find out they are testing for HIV or whether they are HIV positive. If this worries you, ask your doctor or test counselor to explain how your privacy will be protected. Your test and the result are confidential. Only you and your doctor or test counselor will know the result. You will be able to discuss your result with your doctor or counselor, whether it is positive or negative. They will also help you to find any help and support you might need.

### What if my test result is positive?

If your test result is positive, it means that you have HIV. There are many things you can do to stay healthy and live longer. The first step is to see a doctor who has experience treating people who have HIV or AIDS. This doctor will evaluate your health and help you understand the medications that are available to treat HIV.

While there is no cure for HIV, new medications have greatly improved the health and quality of life for many people who have HIV or AIDS.

### What about people I've had sex with?

Your HIV test only tests YOU. It does not tell you about your wife, husband, boyfriend, girlfriend or anybody else. These people can only find out if they have HIV by getting an HIV test themselves.

In Washington State, there are many programs to help cover the cost of medical treatment. If you want to know more about free and low cost health care for people who have HIV or AIDS, talk with your doctor or call:

#### **AIDS/HIV Care Access Project (ACAP)**

To qualify, you must:

- ◆ Have HIV or AIDS
- ◆ Live in Washington
- ◆ Be low income

For more information, call ACAP at **(206) 284-9277**

### Where can I get an HIV test?

The **HIV/STD Hotline** can schedule appointments for HIV testing at many Public Health clinics in King County.

Testing can be confidential (only you and the clinic will know about your test) or anonymous (you can choose not to use your real name).

**Call (206) 205-7837**  
**TTY: (206) 296-4843**

The Public Health **STD Clinic** at Harborview Medical Center offers confidential and anonymous HIV testing on a sliding fee scale.

Call **(206) 731-3590** to find out about walk-in visits or to schedule an appointment. If you need an interpreter, let the clinic know at least one day before your appointment.

You can also get an HIV test from your doctor or health clinic. Costs will vary.

**For other questions  
about HIV or HIV testing call:  
HIV/STD Hotline  
(206) 205-7837**

[www.metrokc.gov/health/apu](http://www.metrokc.gov/health/apu)



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