

Your rights in the AIDS era. 1, Testing / Immunity Publications Ltd.

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immunity

Updated
SECOND EDITION

Society for HIV Research and Education

YOUR RIGHTS IN THE AIDS ERA

1. Testing

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What is testing for HIV?

Testing involves the taking of a sample of your blood for analysis. In the laboratory the blood that's taken is tested not for the virus itself but antibodies to the virus. Your blood produces antibodies to destroy or neutralise things which can harm to your health – but antibodies to HIV can't kill HIV.

How reliable is the HIV test?

The antibody test can be unreliable because it takes a while for the body to develop antibodies to the virus. Estimates vary for the time it takes for the antibodies to develop. Some experts say it takes six weeks, others say it takes longer. Either way, there's a considerable time lag between someone getting infected with HIV and the time their blood has antibodies to it. So a test done before the antibodies develop won't show the person whose blood is being tested is infected. And the test can produce false results: false negatives - which show you haven't got HIV infection when you have - and false positives - showing you've got HIV infection when you haven't. If your HIV test shows a positive result it's usually checked by one of the other methods of testing.

What's the point of testing?

People's attitudes to HIV testing vary. Some object to it because of its emotional effects. Being tested can cause practical problems, like when you want to arrange life assurance or get a mortgage. Among the arguments used in favour of testing are that it may help you and your doctor to know if you have HIV infection - even though there's no known way of destroying the virus - because adopting good diet and living habits could mean you don't go on to develop AIDS and it may help you avoid infecting other people. Another argument for testing is that it may help doctors control the spread of the virus to know where and how it is spreading – and how many people are infected.

Is testing ever compulsory?

Not in this country. But sometimes you may not be able to avoid being tested for HIV. Most often, you ask to be tested, usually at an STD clinic. The people there will know all your details and give you the result. Another type - "anonymous testing" - is where, although you can be matched up to the results of your test, your details are not known to those doing the test. One way of doing this is by your attending an outpatient clinic and being given a number. Then it's up to you to return and get

- then, in our opinion, the person who tests you is just as liable as in the case of testing against your will. That hasn't been tested in the courts yet. But you have the fundamental right to say what happens to your body.

Who will get to know the result of any test?

The result of any test should not, generally, be passed on to anyone without your agreement. Your GP and the hospital owe you a duty of confidentiality. An STD clinic's duty to keep things confidential is absolute but your GP's duty in this regard is not so complete - if your doctor considers it to be for the public good, for instance, he/she may decide to tell your family or partner - even if you object. And a doctor who examines you for insurance purposes should not give details to the insurance company without your agreement - although usually you'll have been asked to sign a form agreeing to that before the doctor examines you.

What happens in medicals for job applications?

Employers often ask you to take a medical when you are offered a job. To refuse may mean you lose the chance of work. But the World Health Organisation and the International Labour Organisation issued a statement in June 1988 saying that "pre-employment HIV/AIDS screening as part of the assessment of fitness to work is unnecessary and should not be required". If you find the medical includes an HIV test, get advice before agreeing to the test. You can ask your GP for a copy of any medical report he - or she - supplies for insurance or employment purposes. Unfortunately, that right doesn't extend to reports by the insurance company's or the employer's own doctor. Unfortunately, that right doesn't extend to reports by the insurance company's or the employer's own doctor.

Are people entering the UK - or wishing to stay here - tested?

The Government's policy is that it "has no intention of emulating those countries which have introduced compulsory screening for immigrants or other groups. Quite apart from the grave problems of principle . . . it would be of little value in controlling the spread of AIDS". But remember that people who intend to stay in the UK for more than six months will normally be referred for medical examination. At present there is no indication that this includes a test for antibodies to HIV.

LONDON AND NATIONAL GROUPS AND SERVICES

Afro Caribbean Helpline Service: Black advisers offering specialised advice and support, Fridays 6pm-10pm, on the National AIDS Helpline (0800-567 123). Calls free

AIDS and Housing Project: Write: 16-18 Strutton Ground, London SW1P 2HP

AIDS Healthline: Information from the College of Health. Daily, 2pm-10pm

Asian AIDS Helpline: Advice given in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi and English, Wednesdays 6pm-10pm, on 0800-282 445. Calls free

Cantonese AIDS Helpline: Advice given in Cantonese, Tuesdays 6pm-10pm, on 0800-282 445. Calls free

Body Positive: Mutual help and support group. Drop-in centre at 51b Philbeach Gardens, London SW5. Write: PO Box 493, London W14 0TS. Helpline: (7pm-10pm) 01-375 9124

Body Positive Support Group: For newly diagnosed people with HIV infection and others with the infection who are anxious, plus the lovers, close friends and relatives of both groups. Meets Sundays at 12.15pm (for 12.30pm) on the second floor at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, 69 Cowcross Street, London EC1

Care and Resources for People Affected by AIDS/HIV (CARA): Christian group offering support to Christians and non-Christians affected by HIV infection and by AIDS. Write: 178 Lancaster Road, London W11 1QU. Phone: 01-792 8299.

Dentists who treat people with HIV infection: NHS Special Needs Dental Clinic, Alderney Street, London SW1. (Mondays, 3pm-5pm, Tuesdays, Wednesdays 9am-12pm) Phone: 01-630 8436 Or: advice on who to see from Mrs Saichell at City and Hackney Health Authority. Phone: 01-253 3020

Drug Users and Ex-Users with HIV infection/AIDS/ARC: run by Terrence Higgins Trust. Meets Fridays 7pm-9pm at Trust's offices (52-54 Gray's Inn Road, WC1) Info: David Bickerton on 01-831 0330

Ealing AIDS Response: Local group. Write: PO Box 16, Isleworth, Middlesex, TW7 6AG. Phone: 01-993 8872

East London HIV Social Group: Meets Mondays 8.30pm upstairs at the London Apprentice, 33 Old Street, London EC1. Info: Nigel Harvey on 01-377 7458

Frontliners: Mutual help and support group for people who have AIDS. Write: c/o Terrence Higgins Trust, BM AIDS, London WC1N 3XX. Phone 01-831 0330

Haringey Health Authority Helpline: Counselling and advice on the phone on 01-801 1490/01808-1061, extension 212 (10am-6pm)

Haemophilia Society: Information, advice and support for everyone who has haemophilia - and special representation of and support for people with haemophilia infected with HIV by using Factor 8. Write: 123 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1. Phone: 01-828 2020

Immunity: HIV research and health education charity. With full-time specialist legal centre for anyone with a legal problem connected with HIV infection, AIDS or an AIDS-related complex. Advice and court representation on offer. Also welfare rights advice. Open 10am-5.30pm. Phone to fix an appointment. Charity and legal centre at 280A Kilburn Lane, London W10 4BA. Phone: 01-968 8909

Italian Drug Users and Ex-Users Group: run by Terrence Higgins Trust. Meets Wednes-

days 6pm-7.30pm at Basement, SCODA, 1-4 Hatton Place, London EC1 8TD. Info: David Bickerton on 01-831 0330 or Dr Massimo Riccio on 01-352 8161

The Landmark: Day centre for people who have HIV infection and people who have AIDS. Will offer advice, recreational facilities, meals. Plus info for other people. 47 Tulse Hill, London SW2. Phone 01-871 7611/2

Lesbian Employment Rights: Non-AIDS specialist. Good on rights at work. Address: as LAGRR Phone: 01-587 1636 (Mon-Thur 7pm-10pm)

Lesbian & Gay Employment Rights (LAGER): Specialist in rights at work. Mainly men. Write: Room 203 Southbank House, Black Prince Road, London SE1 7SJ. Phone: 01-587 1643. (Mon-Fri, noon-6pm)

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: The original helpline. Not an AIDS specialist - but helpful. Write BM Switchboard, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-837 7324 (24hrs)

London Lesbian Line: Information, support and advice for women. Phone 01-251 6911, Mondays and Fridays 2pm-10pm, Tuesdays-Thursdays 7pm-10pm

London Lighthouse: Hospice and drop-in centre. Offers counselling, health advice, support at home, breaks for carers and terminal care. 111 Lancaster Road, London W11 1QU. Phone 01-792 1200

Mainliners: Group for ex-drug users - and drug users who get their supplies on prescription - who have HIV infection or AIDS or a related condition. Write: PO Box 125, London SW2 8EP. Helpline: 01-758 7333. Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm

National AIDS Helpline: Phone - free of charge for free leaflets (0800-566 777) or confidential advice (0800-567 123). 24 hours a day

North London Social and Support Group: Info: Joe on 01-482 4107

Nurses Support Group: Runs helpline for healthcare workers who need advice and help on HIV problems, Mondays and Wednesdays 7pm-10pm, on 01-708 6606

Positively Women: Group of women who have HIV infection or have AIDS. Meets in central London. Info: 01-837 9706 (Mondays-Fridays, 10am-5pm)

Project for Advice, Counselling and Education (PACE): One-to-one counselling and training in counselling. Meetings and write c/o London Lesbian and Gay Centre, 69 Cowcross Street, London EC1. Phone: 01-251-2689

South London Support and Social Group: Info: Rick, 01-675 3919

Standing Conference on Drug Abuse (SCODA): Information officer keeps up-to-date list of needle exchange schemes. 1-4 Hatton Place, London EC1. Phone: 01-430 2341/3

Terrence Higgins Trust: Information and counselling about HIV infection and AIDS. Plus support groups and trained volunteers to help people with HIV infection and people with AIDS. Write: BM AIDS, London WC1N 3XX. Phone: 01-831 0330 (admin only) 01-242 1010 (helpline, daily, 3pm-10pm)

Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information Centre: Not an AIDS-specialist - helpful. Advice on all health issues affecting women, including HIV infection and AIDS. 52-54 Peabody Street, London EC1. Phone: 01-361 6332

Women's Support Group: Run by Terrence Higgins Trust. Info: 01-831 0330

What's AIDS?

AIDS is short for the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. If you have AIDS your body's defence system against all sorts of infections is weakened so much you catch diseases which people whose immune systems aren't affected can just shrug off. And when you catch them, the diseases turn out to be much more serious than they are in people with healthy immune systems. Nobody knows for certain, but it looks as if everyone who has AIDS dies of one of the diseases they catch, such as a fairly rare form of pneumonia. You can't catch AIDS. It develops in you for some reason. HIV probably causes that to happen.

What's HIV?

HIV is short for the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It was first discovered in 1983. Since then it has been called LAV and HTLVIII. But since 1986 the proper name for it has been HIV. It may cause AIDS to develop in you. You can catch HIV infection by allowing your body fluids – blood, semen or vaginal fluids – to become mixed with the body fluids of someone who's already infected. HIV isn't like most viruses because, when you're infected it lives inside blood cells which are part of your body's defence system.

What's Immunity?

Immunity is a charity started in 1985 to research into HIV and to find ways of helping people who have HIV infection stay well. It also runs fitness classes and produces information leaflets and relaxation tapes. With funds from the London Boroughs Grants Scheme, Immunity runs a legal centre in London to give advice and assistance to people who have HIV infection and people who have AIDS. If you'd like more information about Immunity or to visit the legal centre for the first time contact us at the address and phone number at the bottom of this page.

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Society for HIV Research and Education

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