HIV Antibody Test

HIV is a virus which destroys our body's ability to fight illness. It does this by causing defects in our immune system. This is the system that protects our body against infections. This virus is the cause of an illness called AIDS. HIV antibodies are made by the infected person's body when a person becomes infected with HIV.

WHAT IS THE HIV ANTIBODY TEST?

This is a test for HIV antibodies that are found in the blood of an infected person. This test is **NOT a test for AIDS.** It only means that you have been infected with HIV and may eventually develop AIDS.

WHO IS AT RISK OF BEING INFECTED WITH HIV?

- People who have unsafe sex (unsafe sex means having sex without a condom (or other protective barrier) with a person who has the virus.
- People who share IV needles or syringes with a person who has the virus.
- Anyone who got blood, blood products, or organ transplants before 1985.
- Babies born to mothers who have HIV.
- Coming in contact with blood or other body fluids of someone infected with HIV.

WHAT DOES A NEGATIVE HIV TEST RESULT MEAN?

HIV antibodies were not found in your blood. Most of the time it takes our bodies between 6 weeks and 6 months to develop antibodies to HIV. It may take up to one year to develop. During this time, infected people can have a negative result even if they have the virus and will therefore not know if they are putting other people at risk. They should take all necessary precautions to protect others from becoming infected.

WHAT DOES A POSITIVE HIV TEST RESULT MEAN?

- A positive HIV test means a person has been infected with the HIV virus. This does NOT mean that a person has AIDS, but they may eventually develop it.
- A person can give HIV infection to other people through unsafe sex. Sharing IV needles or syringes can also spread HIV.
- A woman who has HIV can give the virus to her baby during pregnancy or at birth or possibly from breastfeeding. Get counseling prior to considering pregnancy. One third to one half of women with HIV infection will pass this infection on to their baby.
- Anyone with a positive test for HIV should not donate blood, plasma, blood products, organs or tissues.

WHERE CAN I GO TO BE TESTED?

- Most county health departments offer HIV Antibody counseling and testing.
- Many doctors and other caregivers offer HIV Antibody counseling and testing.

If you received a blood test from your caregiver, call for your results as instructed. Remember it is **your responsibility** to get the results of your test. Do not assume everything is fine if you do not hear from your caregiver. If you get a positive test result, talk to your caregiver to find out what steps to take to assure you receive the best of care. Numerous medications are now available which improve the course of this infection.

More information can be obtained from the National AIDS Hotlines:
1-800-342-AIDS English
1-800-344-SIDA Spanish
1-800-AIDS-TTY Hearing Impaired

Document Released: 12/15/2001 Document Re-Released: 03/14/2011
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.