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Rhode Island Department of Health
Office of HIV/AIDS & Viral Hepatitis

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Questions You May Have About The HIV Antibody Test

What Is The HIV Antibody Test?

The HIV antibody test is a blood test that shows if you have been infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (also known as HIV). HIV is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), a serious condition that weakens your body's ability to fight off disease. Being infected with HIV does not mean you have AIDS. It can take years for AIDS to develop in a HIV infected person, but if HIV is in your body, you can pass the virus to others.

The HIV antibody test is simple: a technician takes a blood sample from your arm and sends it to a laboratory.

The HIV antibody test is voluntary. Read all the information in this pamphlet and discuss it with your test counselor before you decide to have the test.

How Is HIV Spread?

Rich, Poor, Young, Old, Male, Female, Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Bisexual, Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, Multiracial, Married and Single. **It's not who you are that puts you at risk for HIV infection – it's what you do.**

HIV is passed from one person to another through blood, semen and vaginal fluids. Anyone who has unprotected sex or shares dirty needles with an infected person can be exposed to HIV. Infected mothers can pass the virus to their babies during pregnancy, childbirth or while breastfeeding.

You can't get HIV from mosquitoes or swimming pools. You can't get HIV by sharing dishes, toilets or workspace with an infected person. It's not spread by coughs or sneezes.

How Much Does The HIV Antibody Test Cost?

If you choose to have the HIV antibody test, there may be a charge. Be sure to ask about the cost before you agree to the testing, most health insurances cover the cost. The HIV antibody test is free to eligible individuals at locations funded by the Rhode Island Department of Health. Call (401) 222-2320 or go the web site <http://www.health.ri.gov/topics/aids.php> to find out which test site is closest to you.

Who Else Will Know About The Test?

The HIV antibody test can be anonymous or confidential.

Anonymous

When you have the test done at an anonymous site, you are given a private code number. No one asks for your name. Anonymous testing is the best way to protect your privacy. If you want an anonymous test, you must let your test counselor know.

Confidential

If you have the test done in your doctor's office, hospital, clinic or any other facility, your test results may be put in your medical record. Like all your medical information, your HIV antibody test results are confidential and cannot be given to anyone without your written permission.

However, you should be aware that insurance companies and employers could sometimes gain access to your medical records. If your test shows that you have the virus, Rhode Island law allows the results to be released to certain other people and agencies, for example:

- health care providers who are treating you and
- the Department of Health (with your name attached) to track rates of HIV in the state.

If you are concerned about the confidentiality of your medical records or about the possibility that you will be discriminated against if you take the test, talk to your test counselor. You can also call the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights at (401) 222-2661 for more information.

If you choose to have an anonymous HIV antibody test, you will give the counselor your verbal consent. If you decide to have a confidential test or choose not to have the HIV antibody test, sign the form at the end of this pamphlet.

Getting the Results – How Long Does it Take?

If your test is negative, no HIV antibodies were found in your blood. This means that you are either not infected with HIV, or you have recently been infected and it's too soon for the antibodies to show up in your blood.

If you've had unprotected sex or shared needles with someone who might be infected, you may need to be tested again in three to six months. You can protect yourself while you're waiting for another test by using condoms and/or by not sharing needles.

If your test is positive, HIV antibodies were found in your blood. This means that you are infected with HIV. It does not necessarily mean that you have AIDS. It can take many years for AIDS to develop in an HIV-infected person.

How Will The HIV Antibody Test Help Me?

It will help you to know if you have HIV. If your test is negative, you can stop worrying and take steps to protect yourself from HIV.

If you are pregnant –
or thinking of becoming pregnant – it's important to find out if you've been infected by HIV. New studies have shown that taking HIV medications during pregnancy may greatly lower the chances of passing HIV to your baby.

If your test is positive, here's what to do:

- ◆ get medical treatment so you can live a longer, healthier life;
- ◆ find a support group to help you, your family and your partner deal with the stress;
- ◆ get information about services for HIV-positive people;
- ◆ protect your baby if you are pregnant or a new mother;
- ◆ avoid passing HIV to other by using condoms and not sharing needles; and
- ◆ ask your partner(s) to get tested and/or stay in treatment.

If you cannot afford to pay for medical care, you may qualify for free medicine. Ask your test counselor about the RI AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP) or go to the web site <http://www.health.ri.gov/topics/aids.php>.

If your test is positive, it is very important that your contacts be tested, too. If you don't want to tell the people with whom you've had sex or shared needles about your test results yourself, the Partner Notification Program can help. A partner notification counselor will tell your partner(s) that they have been exposed to HIV without using your name.

For more information about this program, ask your test counselor, call the Rhode Island Department of Health at (401) 222-2320 or go to the web site <http://www.health.ri.gov/topics/aids.php>.

For More Information About HIV you can call:

The Rhode Island Department of Health
Office of HIV/AIDS & Viral Hepatitis

at 401-222-2320
or
go to the Rhode Island HIV/AIDS website at www.health.ri.gov/topics/AIDS
or
Rhode Island Project AIDS Hotlines
at 1-800-726-3010
or
one of the following National AIDS Hotline
1-800-342-2437 (English)
1-800-344-7432 (Spanish)
1-800-243-7889 (TDD/TTY)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
I have been informed about HIV and the HIV antibody test. I understand that no one can make me take the HIV antibody test without my consent.

- Yes, I give permission for my blood to be tested for the presence of HIV antibodies.
- No, I do not give permission for my blood to be tested for the presence of HIV antibodies.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Witness: _____ Date: _____