



## HIV Antibody Test

### What is HIV?

HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) is the virus that causes AIDS. It affects a person's immune system and reduces its ability to fight infection.

### What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

HIV is the virus and AIDS is the end point of HIV infection. AIDS is defined by a number of illnesses or infections that affect a person who has HIV infection. It usually happens after a person who has been infected with HIV for a number of years.

### How does someone become infected with HIV?

People can be infected after having unprotected sexual intercourse or sharing injecting equipment with someone who has the virus. HIV is contained in body fluids such as blood, semen, and vaginal secretions.

### HIV can be transmitted by:

- ◆ Vaginal or anal sexual intercourse without a condom.
- ◆ Sharing drug injecting equipment.
- ◆ During pregnancy, childbirth, or breast feeding if the mother is HIV positive.



### HIV is rarely transmitted by:

- ◆ Vaginal or anal sex with correctly used condom (only use water-based lubricant).
- ◆ Oral sex without a condom (ejaculation increases the risk, as may gum disease).
- ◆ Sharp injuries or splashes (i.e., needle stick injuries for health care workers).

### HIV has not been reported as being transmitted by:

- ◆ Kissing or cuddling.
- ◆ Shaking hands/social contacts.
- ◆ Sharing knives and forks, cups or glasses.
- ◆ Toilet seats or mosquito bites.

### What is a HIV antibody test?

It is a blood test to find out if you have HIV infection. Antibodies are produced in response to infection. If a person has HIV, the body will produce antibodies and can be found in blood.

The test is completely voluntary and confidential. We advise you to talk to health professionals before having the test.



### What does a negative result mean?

#### It means either:

- ◆ The person is not infected with HIV
- Or

The person has been infected with HIV recently, within last 3 months, so the antibodies have not yet been produced. This is called the "window period".

### How accurate are the test?

Modern HIV test are very accurate. For positive results, further confirmatory test will be performed on the blood sample to verify its accuracy.

### What are the advantages and disadvantages for having the test?

#### Advantages include:

- ◆ Modern antiviral treatments can increase the duration and quality of life of people living with HIV.
- ◆ People who know they have HIV may better able to make informed choices about their future life plans.
- ◆ Knowledge about HIV status may prevent further infecting others by practising safe sex and/or changing injecting behaviours.



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### Disadvantages include:

- ◆ It is a very distressing and frightening find out that you are infected with HIV.
- ◆ Some people may misuse their negative results to reinforce their risky contacts in the past.

### Other things to consider:

- ◆ Having HIV test is frequently stressful. Ongoing support is provided from our centre and other agencies.
- ◆ Everyone who is intending to have HIV test is encouraged to discuss their concerns with a counselor, nurse or doctor.
- ◆ All medical information and any discussion at the centre is confidential
- ◆ Testing for HIV can be coded (not named).
- ◆ The Department of Health will receive statistics on new cases but not named individuals.
- ◆ In many countries, there is a legal requirement for HIV infected people to inform present and future sexual partners, if unprotected intercourse is anticipated.
- ◆ Some people with HIV experience discrimination in personal relationship, employment etc.
- ◆ There may be restriction on life insurance and visas in some countries for people with HIV.



## HK Sexual Health Centre

香港情性健康中心

9/F, New York House,  
60 Connaught Road Central,  
Hong Kong

Tel: 2338-0427

Fax: 3160-4887

Email: [sexhealth@neohealth.com.hk](mailto:sexhealth@neohealth.com.hk)

Website: [www.neohealth.com.hk](http://www.neohealth.com.hk)

This pamphlet is intended to provide you with information on HIV testing. It is not intended to replace the need for formal doctor consultation. All clients are strongly advised to check with your doctor about specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing, June 2007.

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