

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE YOU HAVE AN HIV TEST

Your doctor or nurse should explain the following to you before you have the test for HIV:

- Why you might be at risk for HIV
- What a positive or negative test result means
- How having an HIV test can help you and your baby
- How your information will be kept confidential
- What happens to your information if your test is positive
- What treatments are available to help you and your baby if the test result is positive
- Where to get information and support while you are waiting to get your HIV test results back
- Where you can get information and support once you get your HIV test results back
- Where you can get counseling and support about safe sex and safe injecting

## INTERPRETERS

Medical services and information can be hard to understand if you do not speak or understand English. You can ask for an interpreter. By using an interpreter you can be sure everything you say will be understood and ask questions. If you need an interpreter, call 131450 and ask for your language (cost of a local call)

## CONFIDENTIALITY

All health care workers and interpreters are required to keep your information confidential.

## WHERE YOU CAN GET MORE INFORMATION

- Your doctor, nurse or midwife can answer any questions you have about HIV and the HIV test. You can also get information on HIV/AIDS from [www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au](http://www.multiculturalhivhepc.net.au) in 20 community languages.
- If your HIV test is positive, you can call the Multicultural HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C Service for more information and support- 9515 50 30 or freecall 1800108 098
- If you would like to talk to a nurse or a counselor about these issues, the Sexual Health Infoline can give you the details of your nearest sexual health clinic. Freecall1800451624.
- Women's and Family Program, AIDS Council of NSW. Phone: 9699 8756

# I'M PREGNANT

Do I need an HIV test?



Thanks to Winston and Jen Yeung for the use of the photograph of the Turkish mother and child and to L. Gubb of WHO, Europe, for the the use of the photograph of the African mother and child.

This booklet explains what an HIV test is. It also explains why your doctor or nurse will offer to test you for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

## HIV AND PREGNANCY

In NSW all pregnant women are offered an HIV test. Your doctor won't test you for HIV unless you agree to it.

An HIV test can help you take care of your health and your baby's health.

HIV is not common among women in Australia, but it is possible for people to have HIV without knowing. The only way to find out if you have HIV is by having an HIV test.

If you are pregnant and know that you have HIV, there are things you can do to take care of your health and reduce the risk of passing HIV to your baby. These include: taking HIV drugs, giving the baby medicine after it is born, and avoiding breastfeeding. By doing these things, the risk of a pregnant woman with HIV passing HIV on to her baby is very, very low.

## WHAT IS HIV?

HIV stands for the human immunodeficiency virus- this is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. A person becomes infected with HIV when the virus enters their bloodstream. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS -Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

People who are infected with HIV are said to be HIV positive. Over time (usually many years), HIV affects a person's immune system, which means the body is less able to protect itself from disease. When the immune system has been badly damaged by HIV infection, people can get sick from diseases or cancers.

## WHO IS AT RISK OF HIV IN AUSTRALIA?

In Australia, unsafe sex is the main way HIV is passed from person to person. Unsafe sex is any sex where blood, semen or vaginal fluids pass from one person to another.

Although HIV is not very common among women in Australia, some women are more at risk than other women.

You might be at more risk if you:

- Have had unsafe sex with a person who has HIV
- Or if you were born in a country with a high rate of HIV (eg sub-Saharan African countries, some Asian countries and some Eastern European countries).

You could also be more at risk of having HIV if your male partner:

- Comes from a country where HIV is common,
- Has ever had sex with another man,
- Or he has had sex with a person with HIV/AIDS
- Or he has shared injecting equipment such as needles or syringes.

In some countries, HIV is passed on through blood transfusions. The blood supply in Australia is very safe but you or your partner may be at risk if you have had a blood transfusion overseas.

Anyone who has had unsafe sex, has shared a needle or syringe, or had an unsafe blood transfusion is at risk of HIV.

You can't tell if someone has the HIV virus by the way that they look.

## HOW CAN HIV BE PASSED FROM MOTHER TO BABY?

If a woman has HIV, it can be passed to her baby three ways:

- During pregnancy,
- During labour
- Or through breastfeeding.

## HOW DO I GET TESTED FOR HIV?

The test for HIV is a simple blood test. Before you decide whether you want to have the test, your doctor, nurse or midwife will ask about you and your partner's sexual history and if you or your partner have ever shared injecting equipment. They ask these questions of every pregnant woman thinking about having an HIV test. Your answers will help the doctor or nurse understand your history and any risks you may have had.

You may want to think about what you want to tell the doctor or nurse. You do not have to answer these questions if you do not want to.

## WHAT DOES A NEGATIVE TEST RESULT MEAN?

A negative test result usually means that you have not been infected with HIV. However, if you have recently been at risk of infection, then it could be too soon for HIV to show up in your blood. This is called 'being in the window period'. If you have been at risk in the last three months, your doctor or nurse may suggest you have another test in three months' time.

## WHAT DOES A POSITIVE TEST RESULT MEAN?

A positive test means that you have been infected with HIV. This is also referred to as being HIV positive. If you have HIV, your doctor or nurse will send you to a doctor who specialises in treating people with HIV. Your doctor or midwife will still see you for pregnancy care, and the HIV doctor will see you for HIV care.

If you do have HIV, there are treatments that can help your body fight the virus. These can improve your health and help you live longer.

HIV positive results have to be reported to the NSW Department of Health. This information will NOT include your name or any of your personal details.

## GETTING THE HIV TEST RESULTS

You will generally be able to get the HIV test results after a week.

Your doctor or nurse can only give the results to you in person. When they give you the results they will explain what the results mean, and answer any questions you have.

## WHO WILL KNOW THAT I HAVE HAD A TEST FOR HIV?

You do not have to tell anyone that you have had a test for HIV.

There are strict laws about HIV and confidentiality in NSW. Health services need to keep your information private. They cannot tell anyone that you have had an HIV test. All blood tests are coded so that no-one other than your doctor or nurse knows what you are being tested for.

## DO I HAVE TO HAVE THE TEST?

You have the right to say NO to having an HIV test. You should not be pressured into having an HIV test or be tested without agreeing to it.

If you decide to have an HIV test, you also have the right to decide when and where you will be tested. Some women feel more comfortable talking to their GP, their midwife or their obstetrician about HIV. Other women choose to see a specialist service, eg a sexual health service, or go to a doctor who does not know them.