

What you  
need to know  
concerning

**AIDS**  
AND THE  
**HIV ANTIBODY**  
**TEST**

Satu Terbitan  
KEMENTERIAN KESIHATAN MALAYSIA

*"Kami Mementingkan Kesihatan Anda"*

What you need to know concerning  
**AIDS AND THE HIV  
ANTIBODY TEST**

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## What is AIDS?

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AIDS is Acquired  
Immune  
Deficiency  
Syndrome

AIDS is the end stage of a disease caused by a virus that attacks, weakens and subsequently breaks down the body's immune or defence system.

With this breakdown in the body's immune system, a person is likely to: –

- get infected by various germs, including those which normally do not cause disease in normal human beings,
- suffer from several rare types of cancer.

The virus which causes AIDS is called the **human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)**.

At present, scientists and medical experts have not discovered any cure nor vaccine for AIDS. Most of the AIDS patients eventually die from the disease.

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## How does the virus cause AIDS?

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The virus causes AIDS by disabling or destroying certain kinds of white blood cell that normally help the body to fight disease. If these particular cells are destroyed, the body cannot defend itself against infections or prevent certain cancers. AIDS patients are then open to attack from infection and risks of cancers which normally a healthy person can resist.

Though they may get different illnesses, all AIDS patients have something in common: their immune system is not working because of the infection with the HIV or AIDS virus.

After infection by the virus, most people have a prolonged period without illness, but the virus continues to multiply inside their body.

They are called **HIV Carriers**. They then progressively get various diseases due to infection by other organisms and ultimately develop AIDS. The World Health Organisation estimates that within 5 years of infection at least 20 per cent of HIV infected persons will develop AIDS.

AIDS is the end stage of the disease resulting from infection with the HIV. At this stage of the disease, the patient will have **symptoms** such as prolonged fever, unexplained weight loss, diarrhoea, persistent cough and tiredness, **infections** such as pneumonia and some forms of **cancer**. Persons with AIDS normally do not survive very long, particularly if they do not have access to good treatment.

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## How does a person become infected with HIV?

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It is not easy to become infected with the HIV. The virus is very fragile and cannot survive long outside the human body. There are only 3 common ways in which the HIV can enter the body:—

- 1) through sexual intercourse with an infected person
- 2) through infected blood (for instance on needles or syringes) getting into one's blood
- 3) by infected mother to her child before, during or shortly after birth.

HIV from an infected person must enter the white blood cells of another person in order to survive. HIV can only enter another person when the blood, semen or vaginal secretions of an infected person come into contact with the blood or mucous membranes of another person such as during sexual intercourse.

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## Do some people have a higher risk of getting AIDS?

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Yes. Some people are more likely to get infected with the HIV than others depending on their behaviour. This is because of the way the virus spreads.

### RISKY ACTIVITIES ARE:

- 1) having sex with different sexual partners. It is possible that any one of your sexual partners would have already been infected by the HIV. They might also have other STDS and if you are infected with these you could be even more at risk from HIV infection.
- 2) having sex with people who have many sexual partners such as prostitutes.
- 3) sharing of needles and syringes for taking dadah.

For most people the main chance of coming into contact with HIV is through sexual activity. The risk of infection by the virus is increased by having many sexual partners, either heterosexual or homosexual. The next most likely is from sharing needles and syringes when injecting drugs. Drug users are at risk if they share needles and syringes because there is usually blood in the syringe that is passed from person to person.

It is what people do, not who people are, that places them at risk.

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## How can the risks of HIV infection be reduced?

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The only sure ways to avoid exposure to HIV through sexual activity are either

- \* to abstain from sexual intercourse entirely or
- \* to have sexual relationship with only one uninfected

sexual partner and be sure that he or she is faithful to you only.

In the absence of the above two ways, however, **consistent** and **correct** use of condoms with every act of sexual intercourse is the best protection. People who may be or may have been exposed to the virus should always use condoms, even if they are also using other methods of contraception.

For youths who use drugs, the best and safest way to avoid HIV infection and AIDS is to stop using drugs. They are advised to seek assistance to enable them to follow a drug rehabilitation programme. Drug addicts should never share needles and syringes with others to prevent HIV infection and transmission.

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## What is the HIV Antibody Test?

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The HIV Antibody Test is a simple blood test which detects the presence of antibodies to HIV. The HIV antibody is a protein naturally produced in the body in response to an infection by the HIV.

The antibody screening test is important because it provides you with an early indication that you have been infected with the HIV. Early detection can help minimise the likelihood of developing an illness related to AIDS.

However you need to know that the antibody test is not a test for the disease AIDS – it does not tell you if you have AIDS. It will only show whether you have come into contact with the virus which may cause AIDS.

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## What will the Test tell me?

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A **positive** test result shows that the antibody has been found in your blood. A **negative** test result shows that the antibody has not been found in your blood.

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## If you have a Positive Test Result

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### THIS MEANS:

- \* Your blood sample has been tested more than once and the tests indicate that antibodies to HIV are present.
- \* You have been infected by HIV and your body has produced antibodies.
- \* You are infectious and capable of passing the virus on to others through your blood and semen/vaginal secretions.

### THIS DOES NOT MEAN:

- \* that you necessarily have AIDS or an AIDS – Related Condition (ARC)
- \* that you are immune to AIDS
- \* that you will necessarily develop AIDS

You can maximise your chances of staying healthy by avoiding further contact with the virus and other infections and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

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## If you have a Negative Test Result

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### THIS MEANS:

- \* no antibodies to HIV were found in your blood at the time of testing.
- \* you either have not been infected by the HIV or your exposure to the virus was too recent for antibodies to be formed and to be detected.

Most people develop antibodies about 2 – 12 weeks after exposure

## THIS DOES NOT MEAN:

- \* that you are immune to the virus
- \* that you are protected from future infection

You need to avoid high risk behaviours like unsafe sex and sharing of syringes and needles.

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## Who should be Tested?

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Not everybody. Only those who have a high probability of having come in contact with the HIV should be tested.

It is recommended that the following people who face a higher risk be tested:

- \* dadah addicts who inject drugs and have been sharing needles or syringes
- \* prisoners
- \* prostitutes
- \* people with sexually transmitted diseases (STD)
- \* men and women with many sex partners
- \* sex partner(s) of an infected person.

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## Please note :

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- \* Your test results are confidential. No one else will know about it without your consent.
- \* Your consent is needed before the test is carried out.

*If you need more information,  
kindly ask your doctor.*



