

**BE COURAGEOUS AGAIN.
GET TESTED.**



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

HIV has been around for over 20 years but a lot of people still don't know whether they should get tested - or may be afraid to talk about it.

Use this brochure to see if you are at risk for getting HIV. Answering the questions about risk and knowing the symptoms of HIV will help you think about testing. You can talk about getting tested for HIV during your appointment. Write down any questions you may have for your nurse, doctor or counselor, and bring this with you when you see them.

With HIV, it's what you don't know that can hurt you. More people are still getting infected each day, with over 40,000 new cases in the U.S. each year. Over 200,000 Americans have HIV and don't know it. Please don't be one of them. Veterans who get HIV treatment can now live long lives. Get tested now.

Should you get tested for HIV?

If you answer 'yes' or "I don't know" to one or more questions, discuss your answers at your clinic appointment. You may not know the answer to every question, but answer as many as you can. Don't be afraid to be honest.

1. Have you ever been tested for HIV or another sexually transmitted disease, such as syphilis, gonorrhea, or genital herpes?

- yes
- no
- I don't know

2. In the past 20 years, have any of your sexual partners ever had a sexually transmitted disease such as syphilis, gonorrhea, genital herpes, or HIV?

- yes
- no
- I don't know

3. Have you had unprotected sex (without a condom) with two or more sexual partners in the last 20 years?

- yes
- no
- I don't know

4. Have you ever used a needle to inject street drugs or steroids?

- yes
- no
- I don't know

If yes, did you ever share a needle or 'works' with someone else?

- yes
- no

5. Have any of your sexual partners in the last 20 years used needles to inject street drugs or steroids?

- yes
- no
- I don't know

6. Have you ever had sex with someone else in exchange for drugs or money?

yes

no

I don't know

7. Have any of your sexual partners in the last 20 years been men who have sex with men?

yes

no

I don't know

8. Have you had anal sex without a condom with any of your sexual partners in the past 20 years?

yes

no

I don't know

9. Have you ever had a sexually transmitted disease such as syphilis, gonorrhea, genital herpes, chlamydia, or trichomonas?

- yes
- no
- I don't know

10. Are you worried that you may have already been exposed to HIV through sexual activity or sharing a needle or works with someone who is HIV positive?

- yes
- no
- I don't know

Taking a test is the only way to find out if you have HIV. The test is easy, and only takes a small amount of blood. If your test shows you don't have HIV, you can learn how to keep from getting it in the future. If your test shows you do have HIV, you can learn how to stay healthy, get a medical check-up, and get treatment for HIV in the VA.

How to talk about your sexual or drug use history

A lot of people are embarrassed to talk about their sexual history or any present or past drug use. While in the military, VA patients may have been told 'don't ask, don't tell'; so some veterans are afraid to disclose their sexual history or drug use. Your information is confidential and you won't be denied care. VA has special laws to protect confidentiality of information like HIV status. The people who care for you need to know about your sexual and drug-use practices to help you learn more about your risk for diseases like HIV or hepatitis.

- If your doctor or nurse doesn't bring up HIV or ask you about sexual or drug-use practices, **you bring it up**. Use this brochure to start talking about this.
- If someone has come with you to the doctor, like your wife, husband, friend or family member, you may want to ask them to wait outside so you can talk in private.

- You may feel more comfortable talking with your doctor or nurse either before they begin to examine you or after they are through.
- If you feel like your doctor, nurse, or counselor is in a rush, don't be afraid to say that you have something that is important to talk about. Let them know that you want to talk about this so they can take the time to listen.

HIV and Symptoms

- Some people get a rash, fever, body aches or night sweats or feel very tired when first infected with HIV, some do not.
- Even if you feel OK, if you have HIV it is active in your body and you can pass it to others through sex, sharing needles or from mother to child during pregnancy or breastfeeding.
- People who have been infected for a while may begin to have fevers, night sweats, diarrhea, weight loss and yeast infections of the mouth and vagina.

All of these symptoms could be caused by HIV or could be caused by other things. If you have any of these symptoms talk with your nurse or doctor so you can get treated.

HIV Care and VA

You can get all your health care at the VA. Even if you have HIV you still need other health care. VA provides checkups and vaccinations as well as special care for medical conditions. Having your doctors, nurses, pharmacists, social workers and others all in the same place makes it easier for you.

You can get all FDA-approved treatments for HIV. VA doctors can prescribe the best medications to treat your HIV.

You can get treatment for addiction and mental health problems. If you have problems with alcohol or drugs you can get treatment at the VA. If you have HIV, drugs or alcohol can make you get sicker quicker. If you have depression or other mental health problems, VA provides care and treatment.

You can take advantage of the latest research. VA scientists helped develop many treatments for HIV, and that research continues.

Facts to know about HIV

- *Anyone can get HIV*
- *People who have HIV may feel fine and not show any symptoms*
- *Anyone who has HIV can give it to others, even if they feel OK*
- *People who get treated for HIV may live healthier and longer lives*
- *You can learn how to avoid getting HIV or passing it on to others*
- *Information about HIV is confidential and protected by special laws in VA*
- *Excellent care for HIV is available through VA and VA is a national leader in HIV care*

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