

Rapid Oral HIV Test

Patient Fact Sheet

What is a rapid oral HIV test?

This is a test for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. With a rapid oral test, results take about 20 minutes. There are also rapid tests that use a blood sample. Rapid tests are usually used when results need to be delivered within a few minutes, like in an outreach center or homeless clinic; otherwise a traditional blood test is used. The rapid oral test is quite good at detecting chronic (longstanding) HIV infection but not so good at detecting very recent HIV infection.

How does the rapid oral HIV test work?

When HIV enters the body, antibodies are produced. The test looks for HIV antibodies in your oral fluids. The test uses a swab to collect a sample from the inside of your mouth.

What happens when you agree to be tested?

- ▶ The test is explained to you by a health provider.
- ▶ A health provider will ask you to swab your gums with a special swab.
- ▶ Results are ready in about 20 minutes.
- ▶ You will learn your HIV result and discuss what it means. Your provider will give you information about how to protect yourself and others from HIV.
- ▶ If your test result is positive, you will do a second, different, test using a blood sample that is sent to the lab.
- ▶ Your test result will be confidential (results will only be discussed with you). Your test result will not affect your VA benefits.

What does a negative rapid oral HIV test result mean?

This means that HIV antibodies have not been found in your system. This could mean one of two things:

1. You do not have HIV, or
2. You have HIV but it was not detected by the rapid oral test (this is a false-negative result).

It can take up to 3 months for your system to produce enough antibodies to be detected by the rapid oral test. If you have engaged in activities that might put you at risk of HIV infection in the past 3 months, you should repeat the test in a few weeks, or talk with your VA provider about doing a standard blood test for HIV right away.

What does a positive rapid oral HIV test result mean?

This means that HIV antibodies may be in your system. Positive results on the rapid test must always be confirmed by doing a second HIV test. This is because sometimes (rarely) the rapid oral test gives a false-positive result. A person is considered to be HIV positive only if two different test results are positive. The second HIV test is a blood test that is sent to the lab; the results may take up to 1-2 weeks to return.



**U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs**

Veterans Health
Administration

If your positive result is confirmed by a second test, that means:

- ▶ You have HIV and should be evaluated right away for treatment
- ▶ Your testing site will refer you to a clinic that has expertise in caring for people with HIV. They may also refer you for counseling and other support services.
- ▶ HIV treatment (medication) greatly improves health, and can prevent transmission (infection) to others

Why should you get tested?

- ▶ Many HIV-positive people do not know they are infected with HIV, because they have never been tested.
- ▶ Knowing your HIV status helps you protect yourself and others.
- ▶ Getting diagnosed early can greatly improve your health. Although there is no cure for HIV, there are many effective medicines that can control it. Most people with HIV who take their medication every day can live long, healthy lives.
- ▶ If you test negative, you may feel less anxious after testing, and you may be more committed to preventing yourself from becoming infected.
- ▶ An HIV test is part of routine medical care.

For more information about HIV Testing, please visit

<http://www.hiv.va.gov>