CDC FACT SHEET

HIV Testing in the United States

HIV testing is essential for improving the health of people living with HIV and helping to prevent new infections. CDC estimates that 16 percent of people infected with HIV in the United States are unaware of their infection – more than 180,000 people.[1] CDC also estimates that approximately half of the estimated 50,000 new HIV infections each year are transmitted by people who do not know that they are HIV-positive.[2,3]

CDC recommends that all adolescents and adults get tested at least once for HIV as a routine part of medical care, and that gay and bisexual men and others at high risk be tested more frequently. CDC is working to increase testing among people at higher risk in a wide range of settings outside of the medical system.

Benefits of Knowing your HIV Status

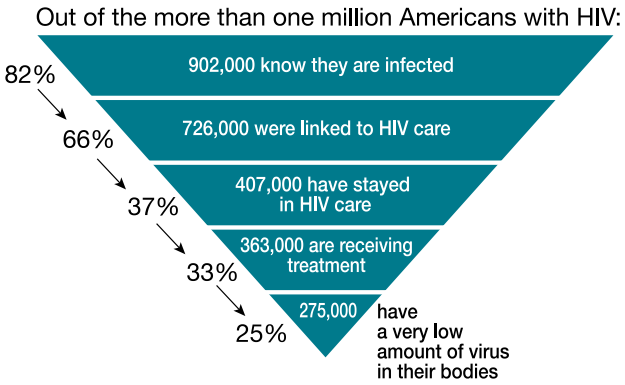
HIV testing has never been quicker or easier than it is today – and it has significant benefits for individuals who are HIV positive and for those who test negative.

For those who have HIV, testing is the gateway to treatment and care. Highly effective treatments make it possible to live a long, healthy life with HIV. However, one-third of people learn they are infected with HIV less than a year before being diagnosed with AIDS, meaning they have already been infected for many years and may not fully benefit from treatment.[4]

Testing also helps reduce the spread of HIV. Early diagnosis allows those infected to take steps to protect their partners from infection, and early treatment can lower viral load, and reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to others by 96 percent.[5]

And, for people who do not have HIV, testing is just as critical because this information can help link them with important prevention services so they can remain HIV-free.

Percentage of HIV-Infected Individuals Engaged in Selected Stages of the Continuum of HIV Care, 2009



Following are three types of HIV tests. If the first test is positive, a follow-up test is necessary to validate the result.

- **Antibody Test:** Detects the presence of antibodies against HIV, which typically develop within two to eight weeks after exposure to the virus. An antibody test can be conducted on a sample of blood or oral fluid.
- **Combination Antigen-Antibody Test:** Detects both the antibody to HIV and the antigen "p24" – a protein that is part of the virus itself. Because the p24 antigen can be detected within four to seven days before antibodies appear – combination tests can also identify very early infections.
- **RNA Test:** Detects the presence of the virus in the blood. An RNA test can detect very early infection, within 10-15 days of exposure, before antibody tests are able to detect HIV.

National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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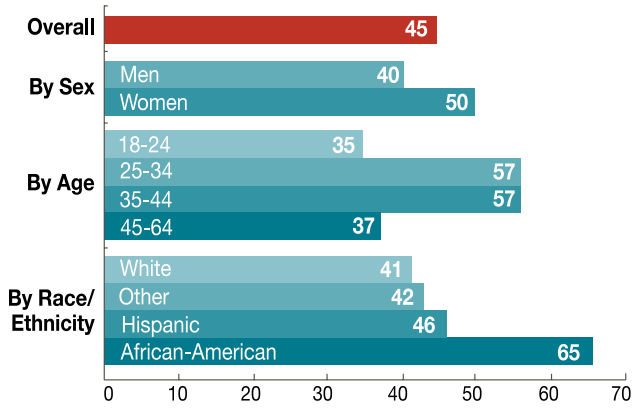
HIV Testing Progress and Challenges

While HIV testing rates have steadily increased, more than half of Americans still have not been tested for HIV in their lifetime.[6]

Lack of access to healthcare, fear, and misperceptions about HIV risk and the testing process itself are key barriers to increasing HIV testing. In addition, some healthcare settings have not yet made HIV testing a routine part of medical care.

Testing rates remain far too low even among groups at high risk for HIV, including men who have sex with men (MSM), African Americans, and youth.

Percentage of People Who Have Ever Been Tested for HIV, Overall and by Population, 2010



- In a study of MSM in 20 U.S. cities, 34 percent of MSM infected with HIV were unaware of their infection.[7] Of those, more than one-third (35 percent) had not been tested in the past 12 months, as CDC recommends.[8]
- Although African Americans are more likely to get tested for HIV than Latinos or whites, more than a third have never been tested.[9]
- Nearly half of high school students report having had sex, but CDC data show that only 13 percent of students overall have ever been tested for HIV.[10]

Working to Increase HIV Testing and Linkage to Care

HIV testing is a core part of CDC's commitment to High-Impact Prevention – a new approach to HIV prevention that aims to achieve a higher level of impact on the epidemic with every federal prevention dollar spent (see "The Future of HIV Prevention"). It is also a key element of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy, which seeks to ensure that 90 percent of Americans with HIV are aware of their status and that more people are linked to care within three months of their diagnosis.

CDC is working to improve testing efforts on many fronts—in both healthcare settings and diverse community venues. For example:

- Providing funding for health departments to implement CDC's routine testing recommendations and provide free or low-cost testing in other settings
- Piloting HIV testing programs in urban and rural pharmacies
- Guiding individuals to nearby testing sites through HIVtest.cdc.gov
- Updating HIV testing recommendations for laboratories to capitalize on the latest available testing technology to identify infections earlier
- Launching new phases of the Act Against AIDS campaign to increase testing in targeted populations, and supporting the Greater than AIDS public awareness and information campaign. Recent CDC campaigns include:
  - *HIV Screening. Standard Care*: to encourage primary care providers to test patients
  - *Testing Makes Us Stronger*: designed for black MSM
  - *Take Charge. Take the Test*: designed for African American women
  - *Reasons/Razones*: designed for Latino MSM

If you are a member of the news media and need more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/Newsroom or contact the News Media Line at CDC's National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention 404-639-8895 or NCHHSTPMediaTeam@cdc.gov).

Key References

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