



# Do You Know Your HIV Status?

## HIV Testing is Extremely Important

### HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)

HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. It targets CD4 cells, which play a crucial role in maintaining normal immune function and in the body's response to fight infection. Infection with HIV results in a person becoming more vulnerable to infections as their immune system weakens.

### AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)

AIDS is used to describe the very late stages of untreated HIV infection. A person with AIDS typically presents with serious infections, typically only observed in severely immunocompromised individuals. Their immune system has become so weak that it can no longer fight off infections with which it would normally cope. With increased testing and advancing treatments, people with AIDS are seen less and less in the developed world.

### General Facts

- People unaware of their HIV status can live with HIV for years without showing any signs or symptoms. During this time they can still pass on the HIV virus to others through unprotected sexual intercourse or sharing of needles.
- With early diagnosis and effective treatment, people with HIV have similar life expectancies to those without HIV
- Although there is not yet a cure for HIV it can be well managed with daily medication and most people living with HIV lead fit and active lives.
- With effective anti-retroviral treatment, people with HIV are unlikely to develop AIDS.

### HOW IS HIV SPREAD?

HIV is spread from person to person by blood and other bodily fluids (such as semen or vaginal secretions).

Generally people living with HIV who are on effective treatment are unlikely to transmit HIV.

The most common route of HIV transmission is through unprotected sexual intercourse with a person who has HIV and who is either not on effective treatment or is unaware they have HIV.

HIV can also be transmitted through sharing of needles among those who inject drugs, and less commonly, from mother to child during pregnancy. In Ireland, women are provided with HIV testing as part of their antenatal care to avoid transmission of HIV to their children.





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### KNOW YOUR HIV STATUS

The only way to know if you have HIV is to have a test. Those who are untested should not presume they are HIV negative, especially if they have ever engaged in risky activity.

It is important to know your HIV status to protect you and your partner's health, especially if you have ever engaged in any unprotected sexual activity or you have ever injected drugs.

HIV is now considered a chronic illness that can be treated and well managed. Testing can allow a person to get the essential care necessary for living a long and healthy life with HIV.

The earlier that HIV is detected, the less damage is done to the immune system and the more effective HIV medications can be in restoring normal immune function.

Testing also reduces the risk of unknowingly transmitting HIV to sexual partners. In Ireland it is estimated that up to 30% of people with HIV remain undiagnosed and are unaware they have HIV.

### WHO SHOULD TAKE A TEST?

Everyone should consider testing for HIV if they do not know their status. This can be part of a regular health check-up

People might consider testing more frequently if concerned about an unprotected exposure

### HOW TO AVOID HIV INFECTION

- Limit risky behaviours that might expose you to HIV:
- Always use a condom in potentially risky sexual encounters
- Avoid situations in which your judgement might be impaired – such as alcohol intoxication or drug use
- Avoid injecting drug use
- Take appropriate preventive measures (including PREP) if you are at risk of acquiring HIV

### HOW IS HIV TREATED?

- Although HIV cannot be cured, treatments are extremely effective and allow people with HIV to live normal lives.
- Modern treatment regimens are typically composed of one or two tablets per day, and as such are both convenient and discrete
- HIV treatment is provided free of charge within the Irish healthcare setting





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### WHERE CAN I GET A HIV TEST?

Most GPs provide blood tests for HIV. Results usually take a few days

Mater Hospital Infectious Diseases Clinic Monday-Wednesday 1:45-6pm: appointment only

Testing is available in GUM Clinics throughout Ireland

St. James' Hospital, James' Street, Dublin 8 GUIDE clinic. Walk-in Mondays, Tuesdays & Thursdays (tickets allocated at 8am). Fridays by appointment only

KnowNow offer rapid testing in non-clinical settings in Dublin, Limerick & Cork. See [www.knownow.ie](http://www.knownow.ie) for details

HIV Ireland, 70 Eccles Street, Dublin 7. Walk-in service on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month from 1pm

Gay Men's Health Service offer testing at a variety of locations. See [www.gmhs.ie](http://www.gmhs.ie) for details

### HIV MOLECULAR RESEARCH GROUP (HMRG)

Established by Dr Paddy Mallon in 2008, the HMRG, is internationally recognized for its collaborative, translational research aimed at maintaining long term health in people living with HIV receiving antiretroviral therapy and research into models of testing to increase early diagnosis of HIV and implementation of HIV prevention strategies.

Based at the Mater Misericordiae University Hospital campus, the group comprises researchers with laboratory, statistical and clinical research expertise. It is funded through a number of streams including the Health Research Board, the US National Institute of Health and several industry supporters

Website: [www.ucd.ie/medicine/HIVMRG](http://www.ucd.ie/medicine/HIVMRG)

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