

HIV testing in Ontario

HIV and AIDS

HIV is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). Being infected with HIV is often called “living with HIV” or being “HIV positive”.

In Ontario, there are two ways to get tested for HIV infection: **nominal** testing and **anonymous** testing.

Nominal testing

Nominal testing means you are tested using your own name.

If your nominal test is positive for HIV, the testing laboratory will report your HIV infection, your name, date of birth, gender, and contact information to Public Health.

Your local Public Health unit will contact you for counselling and support, and will refer you to HIV-related services.

Public Health requires that your sexual and needle-sharing partners be notified that they may have been exposed to HIV. This is known as contact tracing, partner counselling, or partner notification. Depending on the circumstances, Public Health may let you or your doctor notify your partners, and may require proof that your partners were notified. Or, Public Health may do the partner notification directly. Public Health should not disclose your name to your partners, but your partners might figure out that it is about you.

Anonymous testing

Anonymous testing means you are tested without having to give your name or personal information.

If your anonymous test is positive for HIV, Public Health will be informed about the positive test but will *not* get your name.

If your anonymous HIV test is positive, you will be referred to a doctor for treatment. Before treating your HIV, the doctor will probably require you to take a nominal HIV test. If the result of this nominal test is positive, the lab will report your name and personal information to Public Health. Even if a doctor only suspects that you have HIV, they must report your name and personal information to Public Health. See [Nominal testing](#) on page 1 to find out what happens when you are reported to Public Health.

Only an anonymous test site can test you without your name.

Your doctor may offer to test you using just your initials. This is sometimes called “non-nominal” or “confidential” testing. But if this test is positive, you will still be reported to Public Health.

How can I get an anonymous test?

Anonymous tests are free. You do not need an Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) number to get an anonymous test.

You can call the provincial **AIDS & Sexual Health Information Line** about getting an anonymous HIV test. They can tell you which anonymous test sites have drop-in hours and which require an appointment. See page 4 for [information on contacting the Information Line](#).

What happens when I go for an anonymous test?

At the test site, you will be asked for your year of birth and the town or city where you live. If you do not want to give this information, you can just give the year you were born. A counsellor will talk with you about your risk of infection and help you make an informed decision about getting tested.

If you have had unsafe sex or shared a needle with someone, you do not have to give the counsellor any names.

Most anonymous test sites use the “rapid HIV test”, also known as “point of care” test (POC test). The rapid test requires a drop of blood from a finger prick, and the test result is available in a few minutes.

If your rapid test is negative, it means HIV is not showing in your blood at the time of the test. Because it can take up to 3 months for HIV to show in your blood, a counsellor will talk to you about whether you should have a follow-up test at a later date. The counsellor will also talk to you about protecting yourself from future risks.

If your rapid test is “reactive”, it means you are probably infected with HIV. A second test is needed to confirm that you are infected. The counsellor will talk with you about having this test. The second test is still anonymous but you will be given an identification (ID) number. A sample of your blood will be taken to be sent for testing. It takes about 2 weeks for the test site to get your test result. A counsellor will meet with you again to talk about the result. If you are confirmed HIV positive, it means you have HIV and the counsellor will talk with you about things like:

- managing your health and HIV,
 - preventing the spread of HIV,
 - getting support and more information.
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To find an HIV test site, call the
AIDS & Sexual Health Information Line:

Toll-free from anywhere in Ontario:

1-800-668-2437

(English and several other languages)

1-800-267-7432

(French)

In the Toronto area:

416-392-2437

(English and several other languages)

Web site:

www.toronto.ca/health/ai_index.htm

For legal advice about HIV testing and other HIV-related legal issues, contact **HALCO – HIV & AIDS Legal Clinic (Ontario)**:

Phone: **1-888-705-8889** or **416-340-7790**

TTY: **1-866-513-9883** or **416-922-2352**

Web site: **www.halco.org**

This publication contains general information. It is not a substitute for getting legal advice about your particular situation.

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