

LEEDS TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS TRUST OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

THE HIV TEST (Information for Healthcare Workers)

Department of Health guidance (2007) recommends that all new healthcare workers (HCW) are offered a test for HIV by the Occupational Health Service.

Those same HCW who will be performing (EPPs*) new guidance has been published by Public Health England:

http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317140704390

As a result some healthcare workers infected with HIV may (with treatment or without) be able to undertake these procedures but will need strict regular monitoring under the supervision of the Occupational Health Service. All HIV infected healthcare workers performing exposure prone procedures will need to be registered with the confidential national register, the UKAP-OHR (UK Advisory Panel for Healthcare Workers Infected with Blood-borne Viruses. For further information please discuss with an Occupational Health Physician.

Healthcare workers with HIV must ensure that they remain under regular medical and occupational health supervision whilst involved in the direct care of patients. HIV blood tests for individuals can be carried out by the occupational health service on request.

HCW already employed in the NHS are required to have HIV testing if they are moving to a post requiring the performance of EPPs for the first time in their career.

HCW also have a responsibility to seek professional advice about the need to be tested for HIV if they have been exposed to this serious communicable disease.

These measures are not intended to prevent those infected with HIV from working in the NHS, but rather to restrict them from working in those clinical areas when their infection may pose a risk to patients in their care.

WHAT IS HIV AND HOW COMMON IS IT?

HIV stands for **Human Immunodeficiency Virus**. AIDS stands for **Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome**. HIV is an infection that damages the body's defences against other diseases.

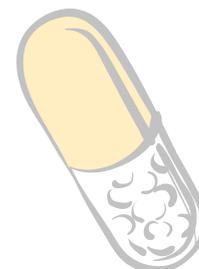
When certain other diseases occur with HIV infection, that person has AIDS. It is estimated that there are over 100,000 people living with HIV in the UK but many of them are not aware of their infection.



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HOW CAN YOU CATCH HIV?

- By unprotected sexual intercourse
- By injection or transfusion with blood from an infected person
- By sharing needles, syringes and other drug injecting equipment
- From an infected mother to her baby during birth or breastfeeding



CAN YOU TREAT HIV?

HIV is now considered a chronic disease. Treatment is available and these anti-HIV drugs have been shown to reduce dramatically the risk of serious illness and death and prolong life expectancy. A recent study showed that treatment prolongs life by 35 or more years. At present there is no cure for HIV.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF KNOWING MY HIV STATUS?

At a personal level it is better to have treatment for HIV before serious symptoms develop. If you know you have HIV you can also reduce the risk of passing it on to others.

Professionally you can avoid work activities that may pose a risk to your own and your patient's health and make career choices appropriate to your infection status. A negative test result may give you peace of mind.

For further information on testing for HIV see the link below:

www.leedssexualhealth.com

ANY DRAWBACKS OF POSITIVE TEST RESULT?

The major benefits to your health of knowing your status usually far outweigh any drawbacks. Drawbacks may include worries about personal relationships and travel restrictions to a few countries.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE FOR HIV TO SHOW UP IN THE BLOOD?

The HIV test measures antibodies to HIV which may take up to 3 months to show up in the blood after you have been exposed. This is called the 'window period' and if you have been exposed within the last 3 months you may be advised to have another test 3 months after that exposure.



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WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF TESTING FOR INSURANCE AND MORTGAGES?

Insurance companies should no longer ask if you have had a HIV test, but only ask you if you are HIV positive. Knowing you are infected with HIV can affect your ability to get life insurance, mortgages and other financial products but this is also the case with other chronic illnesses.



WHAT DOES THE TEST INVOLVE?

A sample of your blood will be taken and sent to the laboratory. Results are usually available within 3 working days.

WHO GETS TO KNOW THE RESULT?

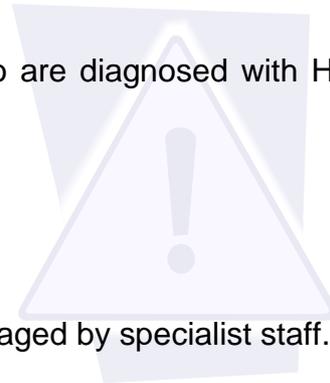
The result is strictly confidential between you and the staff concerned with your occupational health care. Nobody else will be told about the result without your permission.

WHAT HAPPENS IF MY HIV TEST IS POSITIVE?

A member of staff concerned with your occupational health care will inform you of your test results. If the result is positive the result will be checked with a 2nd HIV test. Appropriate occupational health advice will be given and occupational health will arrange for you to meet with a specialist in HIV/AIDS who will be able to give you more information, answer your questions and offer you support and care.

IMPORTANT FACTS TO REMEMBER IF THE TEST IS POSITIVE

- Treatment for HIV is very effective. Very few people who are diagnosed with HIV now die from the disease.
- Full medical confidentiality is assured
- Think carefully before you tell anyone about it
- HIV is common in the UK and many people are being managed by specialist staff.



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*DEFINITION OF EXPOSURE PRONE PROCEDURES (EPPS)

Exposure prone procedures (EPPs) are those invasive procedures where there is a risk that injury to the worker may result in exposure of the patient's open tissues to the blood of the worker. These include procedures where the worker's gloved hands may be in contact with sharp instruments, needle tips or sharp tissues (eg spicules of bone or teeth) inside a patient's open body cavity, wound or confined anatomical space where the hands or fingertips may not be completely visible at all times.

References and Acknowledgements

*Ref: Health clearance for tuberculosis, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV: **New healthcare workers.** London: **Department of Health, March 2007.***

OHS Version 3: August 2014, adapted from original (Feb 2007) with kind permission from Dr Eric Monteiro.

