

FACTS ABOUT HIV

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1. **WHAT IS HIV?** Human Immunodeficiency Virus infects human white blood cells and causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).
2. **WHAT IS HIV ANTIBODY TESTING?** It is a blood test that looks for the HIV antibody. Antibodies are proteins produced by the body to help fight against substances that the body believes are foreign invaders; for example, the body makes antibodies to fight infection by bacteria or viruses.

When you undergo an HIV test, the initial screening test performed on your blood sample is called an ELISA test. If the ELISA were to be positive, it would suggest the possibility of an HIV infection. That same blood sample is then tested two more times and, if the second and/or third ELISA were positive, additional HIV antibody testing would occur.

The next more specific confirmatory HIV antibody test is typically a test called the Western Blot (WB). The WB detects antibodies that react specifically to various components or parts of the HIV virus. If the WB were negative, a person is presumed to not have HIV infection. If the WB is positive, a person is assumed to have HIV infection and may be able to infect others with HIV.
3. **WHY IS A POSITIVE HIV ANTIBODY TEST DISQUALIFYING FOR MILITARY SERVICE?** People with HIV have damaged immune systems, so their health will deteriorate. All new recruits get shots to protect them from diseases. Persons with HIV have a compromised immune system. Vaccinations could be detrimental to their health. They cannot donate blood and all military members are potential blood donors.
4. **HOW DOES A PERSON BECOME INFECTED WITH HIV?** The virus is present in an infected person's blood and other body fluids and spreads in different ways: transfusion of infected blood, sharing contaminated drug needles, sex with infected persons, either heterosexual (male-female) or homosexual (same sex), or from infected mothers to their infants.
5. **HOW DOES THE HIV TEST WORK?** Detects antibodies to the virus. Antibodies are blood molecules that attack germs invading the body. When a person is infected, the virus grows in the blood and the immune system responds by making antibodies to kill the virus. Antibodies are effective in most infections, but they are unsuccessful with HIV and the virus grows. Positive tests are strong evidence that a person has contracted the virus.
6. **WHAT DOES A CONFIRMED POSITIVE HIV TEST MEAN?** It means a person was exposed to HIV and developed antibodies to the virus.
7. **IS THERE A CURE FOR HIV INFECTION?** Not yet, but there is an enormous research effort in the United States and other countries.
8. **WHAT SHOULD A PERSON INFECTED WITH HIV DO?** Consult a physician specializing in treating HIV infections about the status of the immune system. Follow physicians' advice carefully and take all necessary protective action. Although there is no cure for HIV, complications are manageable if caught early. Tell sexual partners about positive results so they can be tested and take necessary protective steps.