

KNOW YOUR STATUS



Testing for HIV

FAQS

Why test for HIV?

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. When someone becomes infected with HIV, and it is left untreated, the virus weakens and damages their body's defence system (the immune system) so that it cannot fight off infections.

Once someone is infected with HIV the virus will remain in their body for the rest of their life. There is currently no cure for HIV and no vaccine to prevent people from becoming infected. However, drug treatments can help most people with HIV to live much longer, feel well and lead healthy lives including sexual health and relationships.

HIV is now a long term manageable medical condition and it is important to diagnose this condition as early as possible for the best outcomes on treatment.

How is HIV passed on?

HIV can be passed from one person to another through sexual contact, and in a number of other ways. Both men and women can have HIV, and can pass it on. You don't need to have lots of sexual partners to get HIV or to pass it on.

HIV can be passed on through sexual activity with someone of your same gender or of a different gender, irrespective of one's sexual orientation. Individuals with female bodies who have sex with others who also have female bodies, have a lower risk of contracting HIV.

Most people with HIV will look and feel healthy, so you cannot tell who has the virus and you can pass on HIV without knowing you have it.

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HIV is passed from one person to another when the blood, semen, pre-ejaculate (pre-cum), vaginal fluids or breast milk of an infected person enters the body of an uninfected person by:

- **Having unprotected vaginal, anal or oral sex.**
- **Sharing sex toys.**
- **Using a needle or syringe (works) which has already been used by someone who is infected with HIV.**
- **A woman with HIV can pass the virus to her baby before or during birth, or by breastfeeding.**
- **The risk of catching HIV from unprotected oral sex is low but it can happen.**

Groups most at risk of HIV are:

- **Men who have sex with other men**
- **Anyone who has multiple sex partners**
- **Sex Workers and their clients**
- **Injecting drug users**
- **Anyone who exchanges sex for drugs or money**
- **Anyone who has a sexually transmitted disease**
- **Spouses and sexual partners of individuals with higher-risk behaviour**

If you are HIV positive starting treatment as early as possible is essential. This will also reduce the virus levels in the body and once the viral load is undetectable also makes it less likely that the infected person will pass on the virus to others.

You can only be certain you have HIV if you have a test.

An HIV test checks your blood for antibodies to HIV. When HIV enters your body, your immune system tries to fight off the infection by producing antibodies to the virus. It can take between three weeks and three months after you have been infected with HIV for there to be enough antibodies in your blood to show up on an HIV test. Newer types of HIV tests look for part of the HIV virus as well and can detect the virus within a shorter period.

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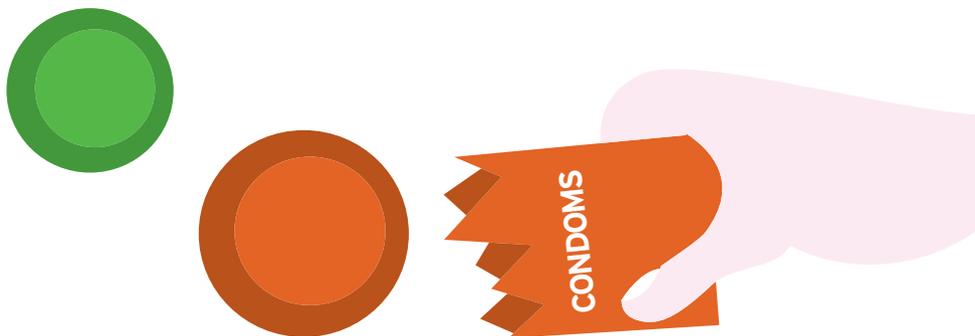
What does the test involve?

The HIV test involves taking a sample of blood (either from your arm or from a finger prick) and looking for HIV antibodies, or antibodies and antigen.

What do the test results mean?

If the result is **HIV negative** this means that no HIV antibodies or p24 antigen were found in your blood. If the test has been done at least three months after the time of your possible risk of infection, then you do not have HIV. If it was less than three months since the last time you could have been exposed to HIV, the test will be repeated at a later appointment.

If the result is **HIV positive** this means that the test has detected HIV antibodies or p24 antigen in your blood. The test will be repeated to confirm the positive result. If both tests are positive this means you have HIV.



Where can I get a test?

You can get an HIV test (free) at the GU clinic in Mater Dei hospital. The service is easy and confidential. Appointments can be made by calling the clinic on **+356 21227981**. You can also get tested at other private run GU clinics in Malta against payment.

It is important to be tested also for other SAI (sexually acquired infections) at the same time.

If you test positive for HIV or any SAI you will be offered free treatment and free counselling.

A free counselling service is also provided by MGRM's Rainbow Support Service.

If you test negative it is a good practice to keep testing regularly in the future.

Recently it is also possible to obtain or purchase Home Testing HIV kits, which give the option of testing for HIV at home. It is important that such kits are obtained from a reputable source and bear the C E quality mark.

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Support Services and Resources

Rainbow Support Services:

RSS provide free support services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, intersex and questioning individuals, their family and friends. They can be contacted on **+356 7943 0006** or email: **support@maltagayrights.org**

National Gay Helpline:

If at any time you require support or you feel like you would like to express your thoughts freely to a person who will understand you, you may also call the National Gay Helpline, run by MGRM on **tel: +356 21430006 / +356 99255559**

Sexual Health:

The Sexual Health website is the Health Department's site covering information on Sexual Health including contraception and SAIs. There is also an LGBTI section.

Mater Dei Hospital:

The GU Clinic offers free anonymous SAI testing. The clinic is at Mater Dei Hospital, outpatients department Level 2. It is recommended that one phones on **+356 21227981** to set an appointment.

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RAINBOW

SUPPORT SERVICE

**For further information, support or advice
please feel free to contact
MGRM's Rainbow Support Service
on T: 79430006 or E: support@maltagayrights.org**



This project is funded through the Voluntary Organisations Project Scheme managed by the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties