

June, 2015 • Facts

HIV

Still an Epidemic

We are now more than 30 years into the HIV epidemic. Increased HIV testing and improved treatments have resulted in more people in the United States living with HIV. This trend is expected to continue.

Prevention efforts have helped hundreds of thousands of people avoid infection. But these efforts have not reached enough people at risk of getting HIV or of giving it to someone else. And so the epidemic goes on.

HIV testing is the first critical step to turn the tide.

Universal testing: a crucial step in the fight against HIV

In 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) began recommending HIV testing for adolescents and adults.¹ They did this for several reasons. One of the most important was that about a fourth of Americans infected with HIV did not know they were infected. Many of these were passing the virus to others. This is still a problem today. The most recent data show that about 14% of infected people don't know they are infected.²

The CDC says everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 should get tested for HIV at least once.¹ And people at higher risk for HIV should get tested every year.¹ This includes:

- Men who have sex with men
- People with more than one sex partner
- People with other sexually transmitted diseases
- People who inject drugs

These people should also be tested:

- Women who are planning to become pregnant
- Women who are pregnant
- People who have been sexually assaulted

The fourth-generation HIV test

In 2014, the CDC recommended a new way to test for HIV. It's called the fourth generation test. It uses a blood sample, just like the older test. But it can detect HIV earlier.³ This is because it tests for an HIV antigen as well as an HIV antibody. The antigen can be detected during the early stage of infection. It can be detected even before the body makes antibodies.



Snapshot of the HIV epidemic in the United States today

These numbers tell the story of an epidemic²:

- New infections per year: about 50,000
- People living with HIV: over 1.2 million
- AIDS deaths since beginning of the epidemic: over 658,000

Of those people living with HIV⁴:

- 86% know they are infected
- 40% are seeing an HIV doctor
- 37% are receiving treatment
- 30% have a very low amount of virus in their bodies

HIV

Still an Epidemic

Facts

Detecting the infection early is very important. People with HIV are very infectious in the early stage of infection. That means they can easily pass the infection to their sex partner. Detecting HIV in the early stage allows treatment in this stage. That will reduce the amount of virus and lower the chance of passing it on. So testing with the fourth generation test can help slow the HIV epidemic.

Too many people don't get tested

Almost half of adults in the United States have never had an HIV test.⁵ Some of the reasons people might not want to get tested are:

- They don't believe they are at risk for HIV.
- They don't believe that having HIV is a big deal anymore.
- They are afraid they will test positive.
- They worry that other people may find out if they test positive. They don't realize that testing is confidential.

HIV and the Affordable Care Act

Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), most new health insurance plans must cover HIV testing for everyone 15 to 65 years of age.⁶ They must also cover HIV testing for people of other ages who are at increased risk. The cost must be covered without copays or deductibles.

What you can do to fight the epidemic

- Get tested for HIV at least once.
- Get tested if you are pregnant, even if you've been tested before.
- Get tested every year if you are at high risk for HIV.
- Encourage others to get tested too.
- Use a condom every time you have sex, and limit the number of your sex partners.
- Get checked for other sexually transmitted diseases. These can increase your risk of getting HIV and of passing it to someone else.
- Use only new, sterile needles and syringes if you inject drugs. Enroll in a substance abuse treatment program.
- If you have HIV, get treated. Work toward complete viral suppression. This will keep you healthy and lower your risk of passing HIV to others.

If you are a doctor, encourage your patients do all of the above.

Additional information

You can find more information about HIV at these Web sites:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: cdc.gov/hiv/basics/
- AVERTing HIV and AIDS: avert.org/living-hiv.htm
- Quest Diagnostics: QuestDiagnostics.com/home/patients/tests-a-z/hiv.html

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC releases revised HIV testing recommendations in healthcare settings. cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/testing_factsheet_healthcare.pdf. Published September 2006. Accessed April 9, 2015.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV in the United States: At a glance. cdc.gov/hiv/statistics/basics/ataglance.html. Updated March 12, 2015. Accessed April 9, 2015.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Laboratory testing for the diagnosis of HIV infection. Updated Recommendations. cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/HIVtestingAlgorithmRecommendation-Final.pdf. Published June 27, 2014. Accessed April 9, 2015.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV testing in the United States. gov/nchhstp/newsroom/docs/HIV-Testing-US-508.pdf. Published November 2014. Accessed April 13, 2015.
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV prevention: progress to date. cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/docs/hivfactsheets/progress-508.pdf. Published August 2013. Accessed April 13, 2015.
6. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The affordable care act and HIV/AIDS. aids.gov/federal-resources/policies/health-care-reform/. Updated March 6, 2015. Accessed April 9, 2015.