



**Information, support and advice for gay and
bisexual men on HIV testing in Northern Ireland**



DON'T THINK... KNOW!



1 IN 4

GAY MEN LIVING WITH

HIV

DON'T KNOW IT



The symptoms of HIV.

Some people can experience sickness within 6 weeks of HIV transmission. During this period the person who has contracted HIV is most infectious to other people. Most symptoms can be similar to the common flu, others include a severe sore throat, fever, aches and a rash on the body. Some people may experience less severe symptoms and may only have a sore throat or diarrhoea.

If you have had unprotected anal sex in the last 6 weeks and experience any of the symptoms go to a GUM clinic and tell them how you feel and the last time you had unprotected sex.

It is important to remember that some people show NO symptoms when they contract HIV. The only way to know for sure if you are living with HIV is to get tested.

Boyfriends and Condoms.

Some people in relationships always use condoms to protect themselves from HIV and other STI's while others don't. If you want to stop using condoms with your partner it is important that you both get tested to ensure you are not living with any infections.

Here are key points to follow if you are considering stopping using condoms..

1. Talk to each other about the trust and honesty needed to make this work.
2. Talk about having a HIV test and how you would feel if someone tested positive.
3. Talk about who you are going to have sex with. Is it just you and your partner or is sex with others allowed? Remember to consider the risks involved in having sex with others.
4. You need to agree what sex you are going to have, or more importantly the type of sex you do not want to have.
5. Before you decide to stop using condoms, both partners need to test for HIV and explain to the clinic why you are testing.
6. If both partners test negative, continue to use condoms for 12 weeks and only have sex with your partner. Return at the end of the 12 weeks and get tested again. This will ensure that the results you receive are accurate and you can then make an informed decision about using condoms.
7. If these tests are negative for HIV and STI's you can stop using condoms knowing you have taken the necessary steps to protect you and your partner.
8. Communication is key. If one partner has unprotected sex with someone outside the relationship, it increases the risk of HIV being brought into the relationship. It is important to tell the other partner and use condoms until you have tested again after 12 weeks.

The benefits of testing.

Knowing your status -

Knowing your HIV status is the best way to make decisions about the sex you have. This will allow you to protect yourself, other sexual partners and people you care about.

Better Health Care -

The earlier someone is diagnosed the better it is for their health. This will allow doctors to monitor their health and start treatment if needed. If you are diagnosed late with HIV infection treatments may not work as well or not work at all.

Worry -

Many people worry about a HIV result. Knowing your status whether it is negative or positive can be a weight off your shoulders. Many people think they are living with HIV and receive a negative test result. Testing regularly will allow people to make informed decisions about the type of sex they have.

Early testing -

Testing early and knowing your status puts you in control of your health. You can take steps to protect yourself and others during sex, get advice on treatment and make any changes to your lifestyle that are required. It is easier to manage a positive result when you are healthy and not sick. Testing early keeps you in control.

I am too scared to have a HIV test!

Plucking up the courage to have a HIV test can take a lot for some people and can be a very stressful time for them.

Effective treatments for HIV mean that HIV is a manageable illness and people living with HIV have a normal life expectancy. Early diagnosis allows for more effective treatment. It is important to test for HIV at least once a year if you are sexually active or have had unprotected sex and more regularly if you are changing partners frequently.

Not testing will not make HIV go away. HIV could be damaging your health and compromising your immune system without your knowledge. Delaying treatment reduces its effectiveness.

One in four gay and bisexual men living with HIV don't know it. Testing for HIV will allow you to be in control of your health and make decisions that will protect you and others. Many people become worried and anxious about not knowing their HIV status. Concerns that they will test positive or not wanting to deal with the issue can cause a lot of stress and worry. You can talk to staff at The Rainbow Project or local GUM clinic about these concerns.

Have I taken risks?

Many people think that they don't need to have a HIV test because they don't think they have taken risks. The only way to make sure you are not living with HIV is to have a test.

The bodily fluids which contain enough HIV to infect someone are semen and pre-cum, vaginal fluids, breast milk, blood and mucous found in the rectum. Other fluids such as saliva and urine do not contain enough of the virus to infect another person.

HIV is most commonly transmitted through unprotected sexual activities such as

- * Unprotected anal sex (insertive or receptive)
- * Unprotected vaginal sex
- * Unprotected oral sex

The safest way to have sex is to use protection. Using condoms and water based lubricant for penetrative sex is the most effective way to stop HIV transmission from one person to another. Using condoms and dental dams for oral sex will also reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

If you have taken risks recently or in the past you may want to have a full STI and HIV check-up. Testing is available at The Rainbow Project and local GUM clinics across Northern Ireland.



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