

HIV Analysis

When a strange agent enters our organism, the organism reacts producing some proteins called antibodies, which later turn into our defence system against this agent. Once antibodies are produced as a part of fight against pathogens, symptoms similar to influenza symptoms can be produced at times accompanied by high fever and swollen glands. The same happens, when HIV virus enters our body.

Lots of people inappropriately call the blood test, which is carried out to find out if HIV is present in our organism, the AIDS test. AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) is not an illness in itself but a medical problem, which includes several symptoms, an advanced state of infection with HIV (See *InfoVIHtal#31: What is AIDS?*).

Moreover this test does not detect the presence of HIV directly but of so called antibodies, which warns of the presence of the virus in the organism.

Once HIV is acquired, it is necessary for 2 weeks to 6 months to pass in order to detect the antibodies in the blood (Time known as Window Period). Although a person can have HIV, the result of their antibodies test could be negative. In some very rare cases the antibodies of HIV take a year to show a positive result, however the HIV infection is transmitted during all this time.

Which test is used to determine the antibodies of HIV?

The test, which is mostly carried out, is known as ELISA. This test is not completely precise because it might yield false positive results at times. Therefore if the result of ELISA Test is positive, another more specific test known as Western Blot or IFA is carried out to confirm the first positive test, and because of this, it is known as "confirmation test" since it is carried out after a positive result of ELISA Test.

When should it be done?

The decision to do the HIV test is personal and of course it would depend on the methods carried out, which could have shown a risk. Finding out on time the positive diagnosis of HIV can help to control the course of infection better, reducing the possibility of the appearance of the opportunistic diseases related to HIV, which can mean progression to AIDS.

Any person, man or woman can have acquired HIV if their blood or mucous have been in contact with the blood, semen, breast milk or vaginal fluid of a person infected with HIV. For example there is a high risk of transmission in a sexual relation with penetration without protection (See *infoVIHtal#14: Unsafe sex*).

How is it done?

A small sample of blood is enough to carry out the analysis of the detection of HIV antibodies. This test should always be carried out voluntarily and never used as a requirement for obtaining employment, joining an education centre, obtaining a mortgage or becoming a member of a voluntary group for help. If you think you have been discriminated because you have had to do an HIV Test involuntarily, you can ask for legal advice from 'Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y VIH/SIDA de la Red 2002' (www.observatorio.red2002.org.es/).

HIV Test can be done anonymously and confidentially. We say it is confidential even though the name of the person is required and the result of their test becomes part of their medical history, the confidentiality of the aforementioned information is guaranteed by the health personnel i.e. it is dealt with strict professional secret.

When the test is anonymous no name or any other personal information is required for identification. You are given a card with an identification number or a secret code, which should be shown to receive the results.

Where can it be done?

The public health centres offer the possibility of doing the HIV Test confidentially and free. It is a voluntary test, which requires the interested person's agreement. Anonymous test can also be done in certain nongovernmental organizations.

Some of these organizations are:

Counselling and HIV/AIDS Test (anonymous and free)

Stop-Sida (Barcelona) Tel. 902 10 69 27	Asociación SARE Pamplona Tel. 948 177 244
Asociación Ciudadana Anti-SIDA de Cataluña Tel. 933 170 505	Comité Ciudadano Anti- SIDA de la Región de Murcia Tel. 968 283 839
Hispanosida (BCN) Tel. 933 182 056	

In order to obtain more information about the HIV Test, you can call:

Free information telephone:
Cruz Roja Española 900 111 000

State telephones of information of NGO:
Coordinadora Gay-Lesbiana: 93 298 00 29 (9h a 22h)
Red 2002: 637 811 796
Coordinadora Estatal de VIH/SIDA (CESIDA): 902 362 825

Telephones of the Autonomous Regions:

Andalucía: 900 850 100
Aragón: 976 439 988
Asturias: Gijón: 985 38 92 88 / Oviedo: 985106 900
Balears: 971 176 868
Canarias: 902 114 444
Cantabria: 942 207 745
Castilla-La Mancha: 925 267 763 / 925 267 758
Castilla y León: 983 413 600
Cataluña: 900 212 222
Ceuta: 956 503 359
Extremadura: 900 210 994
Galicia: 981 542 960
Madrid: 912 052 350
Melilla: 952 683 210
País Vasco: 943 006 464
La Rioja: 941 291 197 / 941 255 550
Valencia: 900 702 020

Ministerio de Sanidad y Consumo
(www.msc.es)