

## What are the main kinds of HIV tests? - HIV testing, part 4

There are three main kinds of HIV tests:

- Antibody tests
- Combination tests, which are also called antibody-antigen tests
- Nucleic acid tests, which are also called NATs



How soon each test can detect HIV infection differs because each test has a different window period. The window period is the time between when a person gets infected with HIV and when a test can accurately detect the HIV infection.

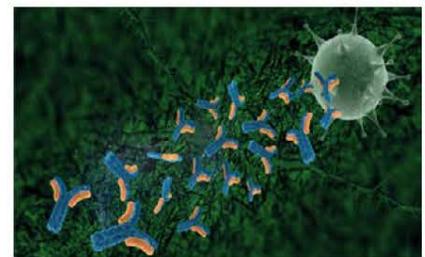
If an HIV test done during the window period is negative, a second test should be done 3 months after the possible exposure to HIV. This repeat testing makes sure that the HIV infection can be accurately detected after the window period, no matter what kind of HIV test is used.



**Antibody tests** check for HIV antibodies in blood or fluids from the mouth. HIV antibodies are disease-fighting proteins that the body produces in response to HIV infection. It can take 3 to 12 weeks for a person's body to make enough antibodies for an antibody test to detect HIV infection.

**Combination tests** are also called antibody-antigen tests. They can detect both HIV antibodies and HIV antigens in blood. Antigens are part of the virus itself. It can take 2 to 6 weeks for enough antigens and antibodies to be made so that a combination test can detect HIV infection. Combination tests are now recommended for HIV testing done in labs, so they are becoming the most common HIV blood test.

**NAT tests**, or nucleic acid tests, look for HIV in the blood. These tests are also called RNA tests or Viral Load tests. NAT tests can detect HIV infection about 7 to 28 days after a person has been infected with HIV. NAT tests are very expensive and not often used unless the person had a high-risk exposure to HIV.



### Home HIV Tests

There are two HIV tests approved for home use, Home Access HIV-1 Test System and OraQuick In-Home HIV Test. Both are antibody tests.

The **Home Access HIV-1 Test System** involves:

- Pricking the finger for a blood sample
- Sending the sample to a lab for testing
- Calling the lab for results as early as the next day

If the result is positive for HIV, the lab will do a follow-up test on the same blood sample to confirm the first HIV-positive test result.



The **OraQuick In-Home HIV Test** comes with a test stick and a tube with a testing solution. The test stick is used to swab the mouth to get a sample. The test stick is inserted into the test tube and results are ready in 20 minutes. A positive result with this home HIV test must

always be repeated by a lab in a health care setting. 1 in 12 people who **do** have HIV may get a negative result with this test. This is known as a false negative.

Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about HIV/AIDS. Your public health department, health care provider, and public library can help.



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