

What does a negative HIV test result mean? - HIV testing, part 6



A negative result may not always be accurate. It depends on when you might have been exposed to HIV and when you took the test.

That's because of the window period, which is the period of time after you may have been exposed to HIV, but before a test can detect it. The window period depends on the type of HIV test that you take.

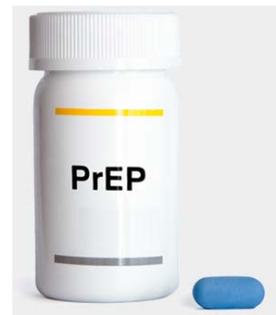
If you have a negative antibody test within 3 months of a possible HIV exposure, get tested again 3 months later.

For NAT, or nucleic acid tests, that time frame may be shorter. NAT tests are also called combination, RNA, or Viral Load tests.

Ask your healthcare provider if and when you need to be retested after you get a negative HIV test result.

In the meantime, continue taking steps to avoid getting HIV, such as:

- Using condoms during sex
- Not sharing needles and other drug equipment or "works"
- Taking pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP medicine to help prevent HIV infection if you are HIV negative but are at very high risk for HIV.



Remember - a negative result is only good for **past exposure**. If you get a negative test result, but continue to engage in high-risk behaviors, you are still at risk for HIV infection.



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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