What to Know About HIV

What is HIV?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) attacks the body's immune system. If not treated, it can lead to AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

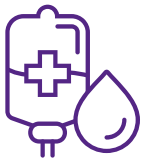
How does HIV spread?

Sex without a condom

Sex without PrEP (medicine to prevent HIV)

Sharing needles or syringes

From mother to child during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding



Blood transfusions with infected blood (very rare today)

HIV is not spread by:

Hugging or kissing

Sharing food or drinks

Using public toilets

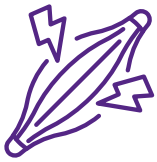
Mosquito bites

What are the symptoms of HIV?

Early on, you may have symptoms that can look like those caused by the flu or other viruses. Common early symptoms include:

Headache

Fatigue



Aching muscles or joints

Sore throat

Swollen glands

Fever

Red rash

Ulcers

Unexpected weight loss

Know your status – get tested

Free, confidential HIV testing is available in Rhode Island.

Finding your HIV status early saves lives.

Treatment helps people with HIV live long, healthy lives.

What is an HIV Test?

An HIV test checks a sample of your blood, saliva (spit), or urine (pee) to see whether you are infected with HIV.

Who should get tested for HIV?

Everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 should get tested for HIV at least once. People with certain risk factors should get tested more often. Talk to a doctor or healthcare professional about how often you should get tested.

Why should I get tested for HIV?

The only way to know your HIV status is to get tested. If your test is positive, you can take medicine to treat HIV to help you live a long, healthy life and protect others. If your test result is negative, you can take steps to prevent HIV.

How it works

- Testing sites will ensure your confidentiality before taking a blood sample.
- A rapid test can be done using only a finger stick sample of blood. It only takes 20 minutes.
- Rapid tests are used as a screening tool. If a rapid test comes back positive, you need to take a blood test to confirm the results.

Cost

HIV tests are covered by most health insurance. Many testing sites also offer free or low-cost testing. Check with the site for more information.

Where to get tested

- Find a primary care professional or clinic near you.
- Check out the Rhode Island Department of Health's Testing 1-2-3 Program (testing123ri.com) for help getting tested for HIV, Hepatitis C, and sexually transmitted infections.
- Get a free, confidential rapid HIV test from several community organizations across Rhode Island.
- Order a free, at-home HIV test kit from AIDS Project RI.

To learn more about testing options or get help finding care or condoms, visit health.ri.gov/youroptions or check out the RIghtToKnow app. You can also call the Rhode Island Department of Health at 401-222-5960.

Privacy

Depending on where you get tested, HIV tests are either anonymous or confidential. Both kinds maintain the highest degree of privacy.

Prevention is power

- Use condoms correctly every time.
- Get tested regularly. Learn more about who should be tested at health.ri.gov/hiv/hiv-testing
- Take PrEP (pills or shots that reduce your chances of getting HIV) if at risk. Learn more at health.ri.gov/prep.
- Never share needles.

It is important to get the care you need to stay healthy. If you have legal questions related to immigrants' rights to confidentially access healthcare services, call Dorcas International at 401-784-8607.

RHODE ISLAND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

DORCAS INTERNATIONAL
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