

“Anyone who offers the test should be required to go to a facility where they are not known and be tested and counseled.”

Assess Risk and Prepare the Consumer to Test

Based on an interview with Edith Springer, ACSW

To begin with, anyone who gives the HIV test or offers the HIV test to clients should be required to go to a facility where they are not known and pose as a regular client to be tested and counseled.

Risk Assessment leads to Pre test counseling. Both are conducted privately.

Risk Assessment

Explain that you want to ask them some questions that will help you determine their risk for HIV. Always start with the least personal questions.

This is a good time to fill out an HIV test report form.

Have you been out of the country in the last 20 years?

The goal is to find out if they had sex with someone in a country of high prevalence like Africa. And to get them comfortable answering questions.

Did you have a blood transfusion before 1985?

Do you have sex with men, women, or both?

If your client answers “yes” to a question about whether they had sex, ask if they used protection. You may also want to find out whether the sex included vaginal intercourse, anal intercourse, or oral sex.

Have you ever had sex with someone who has been incarcerated?

Have you purchased sex from a prostitute?

Have you had sex with anyone whom you suspect to be HIV infected?

Risk Assessment continued

Have you ever had sex with anyone who injected drugs?

Have you had sex with anyone who might have had sex with some one infected?

Have you had sex with someone who is HIV+ ?

Clients may ask, "How can you tell if someone is infected?"

The answer:

It is not possible to tell if someone has HIV by their appearance. They could look very healthy; the only way to know is if they tell you.

Have you ever injected drugs?

Did you ever share an injection needle? Cooker? Cotton? Water glass?

Review the assessment

Tell the client your assessment. Their risk may be very low, moderate, or very high. You will want to be able to refer back to this assessment after they get their results.

**You seem to have X level of risk.
Are you concerned about your HIV status?**

Have you ever been tested?

If the answer is, "yes" ask:
What was the test result?.

Offer to explain the test

Would you like to know more about the HIV test?

Explain the HIV test:

- the procedure
- the time frame for test results
- what a positive test means
- what a negative test means.

A negative test means that no HIV antibodies were detected at this time. However, if you engaged in risky behavior during the past three months, you may be infected, despite a negative test result.

Review how the virus is transmitted, including perinatal transmission.

The Window Period

Discuss how long it takes to create antibodies and explain that the test is for HIV antibodies and not HIV itself. Pull out a calendar and point to a date 3 months prior to help explain that a test today will reflect their HIV status up to that point.

Whether or not the client agrees to the test, explain:

Whether you test negative or positive, it's important to practice safer behaviors. If you're free of the virus, safe sex and/or safe injection practices will keep you free of HIV. If you test positive for HIV, safer behaviors will allow you to avoid passing the virus on to others and can protect you from infection with an STD or another strain of the HIV virus.

Review prevention techniques (condoms, dental dams, non-penetrative sex, not sharing injection equipment).

Would you like to take the test?

Pre-Test Counseling

Pre-test counseling is a natural extension of risk assessment that begins when a consumer agrees to the HIV test.

Even if your client declines to be tested, if you told them that they have risk, you've planted a seed that may change their behavior. For those with high risk behavior who **do** take the test, we usually recommend that a negative test result be re-checked in 3 months.

Between the time you take the test and when you get your results, it is important to avoid risk behavior so your results are as accurate as possible. If you have unprotected sex or share injection equipment tonight, after you take the test, you could become infected and it could take up to three months for your body to generate enough antibodies to show a positive result.

If you test positive, who would you tell?

It is a good idea to figure out in advance who they will tell, **and write those names down**. This may help them avoid telling someone impulsively and regretting it later.

Continued...

Some people have told close friends that they were HIV+ only to find that the friend told others without permission.

There are three categories of people to tell:

- (1) Those who will support them including family, friends, therapists. It is important to make sure that the family and friends they tell will keep the information confidential. Some people have told close friends, only to find that the friend told others without permission. If family members and friends cannot be supportive and trusted to keep the information confidential, it is better not to tell them. There are counselors and groups that can provide support and keep confidentiality.
- (2) Those who have a need to know because they are at risk or will be at risk. This includes sexual partners and drug injection partners.
- (3) Medical and dental providers need to know in order to give the best care and monitor signs of HIV related illnesses.

How would you tell them?

A client may want to tell a loved one gradually, over time.

A good starting point is to mention that he's learning about HIV/AIDS and share some of what he's learned.

Some people prefer to tell a loved one in the office of the HIV counselor, especially when the loved one is a parent.

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