

**If the test result is  
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### **Post-Test Counseling**

Excerpts from an interview with Edith Springer, ACSW

#### **IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE TEST**

After your clients take the test, make yourself available to them while they're waiting for the results. Offer them a phone number or someplace to go for help if they get nervous during the waiting period. If they take the venipuncture test and the results won't be back for two weeks, make an appointment for them about mid-way as a matter of course.

Clients can call the 24-hour HIV hotline and speak to counselors about any fears, doubts, and questions they may have about HIV or AIDS.  
800 342-2437 (800-342-AIDS).

#### **REFER TO ASSESSMENT**

When you give a client their results, you will want to be able to refer back to the risk assessment you did with them during pre-test counseling.

Sometimes, when people receive a positive test result they say, "It's a mistake. The test is wrong."

Looking back at the risk assessment, seeing the level of risk indicated, is a way of helping them move past denial.

If the test result is negative in spite of risky behavior, they may believe that they have some magic working for them.

So you go back to the assessment and tell them how lucky they were.

Suggest that, if they continue their risky behavior, they may not be so lucky next time.

However, if they start practicing safe behaviors *now*, they can take that wonderful gift and make it last a lifetime.

**You can make a referral to medical care but if they're upset, they won't hear it.**

#### GIVE RESULTS IMMEDIATELY

Don't talk about the weather and don't say, "I'm happy to tell you..." or "I'm sorry to tell you..." Give results immediately.

Ask if they're ready to hear the results and then say, "Your test result is X."

#### EXPLAIN THE RESULTS

If they have a negative result, explain, "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." Explain the window period. (For details see LINKS).

If they have a positive result, ask, "What does that mean? What does a positive result mean?"

#### IF THE RESULT IS POSITIVE

If they test positive for HIV, stay with them and offer counseling then and there. Are they upset? If they're silent, don't intrude, but after a respectful time, probe by asking, "How do you feel?" OR "What's going on with you right now?"

You can make a referral to medical care but if they're upset, they won't hear it. So you write it down and put it in their hand. Let them know who they can talk to if they get upset this evening or tomorrow.

Some HIV EIS Counselors call the medical caregiver to make an appointment then and there.

One veteran arranged for a case manager or nurse to be there when giving a positive result.

She wanted the client to have face-to-face contact with the person who would be coordinating their medical care.

They may crave drugs. They may want to talk to someone about their partner or their children. Let them know the availability of others in the facility in addition to yourself. You may want to ask, "Is there a counselor here that you like to work with?"

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**Disclosure to the wrong person may subject them to ostracism and can cost them their housing or job.**

When a person finds out they're positive, sometimes they rush out and tell people.

Unfortunately, disclosing to the wrong person may subject them to ostracism and can easily cost them their housing or their job.

Bringing up disclosure\* once again will allow them to think it through.

Counsel them not to disclose to just anyone.

If family members won't support them (...what have they said about AIDS?) you may have to counsel them not to tell family members.

\* We recommend discussing disclosure as part of group discussion as well as during pre-test counseling—which is conducted privately.

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