



HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Testing and Prevention

What is HIV?

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is a virus that damages the immune system. Without treatment, people with HIV may develop AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). With treatment, most people with HIV can live long and healthy lives.

How do people get HIV?

The most common ways people get HIV include:

- Having unprotected (no condom) vaginal or anal sex.
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment.

HIV can be passed to a child during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding. Starting treatment in early pregnancy greatly reduces the chance a baby will be born with HIV.

HIV doesn't spread through saliva, sweat, tears, or urine, and doesn't pass through unbroken skin. Getting infected from oral sex is rare.

What should I know about HIV testing?

Many people with HIV don't know they have it because they have no symptoms. The only way to know is by testing.

The HIV test is a blood test. All adults and teens should get an HIV test at least once in their lifetime and more often for those at risk. If you receive a:

- Positive test result, you have an HIV infection.
- Negative test result, HIV wasn't found at the time of testing.

It's possible to test negative for HIV but still be infected. It may take 3 to 6 weeks after being exposed to test positive. Rarely it can take up to 3 months. This is called "the window period." To be sure you don't have HIV, you should have another HIV test 3 months after your last possible exposure.

How can I get an HIV test?

You can request HIV testing by either:

- Using our online Sexual Health E-visit (kpdoc.org/evisits).

- Messaging your doctor on kp.org.

- Walking into any Kaiser Permanente lab and requesting an HIV test without a doctor's order.

How can I protect myself from HIV?

There are many ways to protect yourself from getting HIV:

- Use condoms for anal and vaginal sex.
- Talk with your partners about HIV status. People with HIV who take medications to maintain an undetectable viral load can't pass HIV to others.
- Don't share needles, syringes, or other injection equipment for drug use, tattoos, or piercings.
- Consider HIV PrEP or HIV PEP to prevent infection.

What is HIV PrEP?

If you're HIV-negative, HIV PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) medications can help prevent HIV infection. There are daily, on-demand, and injectable versions that are effective for preventing HIV when taken as prescribed. Talk to your doctor if you're interested in HIV PrEP.

What is HIV PEP?

HIV PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) is treatment with a medication to reduce your chance of getting HIV **after** a possible exposure, such as:

- Having unprotected sex.
- Sharing a needle with someone who might have HIV.

PEP is most effective when you start it as soon as possible after exposure. **If you think you may have been exposed to HIV in the past 72 hours**, call our 24/7 Appointment and Advice Call Center at **866-454-8855** immediately.

What are STIs?

STIs are sexually transmitted infections (also called sexually transmitted diseases or STDs). They're usually passed through vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Some STIs can be transmitted through sharing needles and through skin-to-skin contact.

Sometimes people with STIs have symptoms, but not always. The only way to know for sure is to get tested.

Chlamydia and gonorrhea

Chlamydia and gonorrhea are caused by bacteria and may be transmitted during unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex. These infections are:

- Detected with a urine test or throat and rectal swabs (for oral and anal sex). It's recommended to test each body part you use for sex.
- Curable with antibiotics.

Symptoms may include unusual discharge (fluid) from the vagina, penis, or anus, or burning with urination. Some people may have no symptoms.

Syphilis

Syphilis is caused by a bacterium and is spread through direct contact with a syphilis sore or rash, usually during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. You can also get infected if the bacteria enter your body through broken skin. During pregnancy, a pregnant person can pass syphilis to their baby. This infection is:

- Detected with a blood test.
- Curable with antibiotics.

Common symptoms include fever, rash, and a painless sore on the skin, genitals, or mouth. After the sore or rash disappears, the infection is still there and needs treatment.

Herpes (HSV) and genital warts (HPV)

Herpes and genital warts are caused by viruses and may be transmitted during skin-to-skin contact. Condoms may help, but only if they cover the infected skin.

- Herpes usually causes sores around the genitals, anus, or mouth.
- Genital warts are fleshy growths around the genitals or anus that are usually painless but may be itchy.

If you have a rash, a bump, or a sore that you think might be an STI, schedule an appointment right away. **It's important that you have an exam before the rash, bump, or sore goes away.**

How can I protect myself from STIs?

To prevent STIs:

- Use condoms for anal and vaginal sex.
- Talk with your partners about STI risk and the steps you'll both take to stay safe.
- Get tested for STIs and encourage your partners to get tested.

How do I get tested for STIs?

You can request STI testing by either:

- Using our online **Sexual Health E-visit** (kpdoc.org/evisits).
- Messaging your doctor on **kp.org**.
- Calling the Appointment and Advice Call Center at **866-454-8855**.

Get tested!

Getting tested for HIV and STIs is one of the most important things you can do for your health. If any of your tests are positive, we'll make sure you get the care that's right for you. We also offer help and advice on talking to partners.

To get started with testing, use our easy online **Sexual Health E-visit**:

kpdoc.org/evisithelp



This information is not intended to diagnose or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only. Some photos may include models and not actual patients.