



What now?

**Negative
HIV test result
– what now?**

YOUR HIV TEST RESULT IS NEGATIVE (-)¹, WHICH MEANS THAT YOU HAVE NOT CONTRACTED HIV. YOU MAY BE WONDERING WHAT THIS MEANS AND WHAT TO DO NEXT.

It all depends on the type of test. This may seem a bit complicated, so it's useful to know that **there are two types of tests:**

- If you received a negative **4th generation**² test result, it means that you have not been infected in the past 6 weeks or earlier.
- If you received a negative **3rd generation**³ test result, it means that you have not been infected in the past 12 weeks or earlier.

1. A negative result literally means that no HIV antibodies or viral antigens were detected in your blood sample. The antigen is a part of HIV and antibodies are produced by your body in response to HIV infection. However, both antigens and antibodies do not appear in the blood immediately after the virus enters. In other words, HIV infection can be detected much earlier than it can be definitively ruled out.

2. HIV COMBO/HIV DUO.

3. Usually a so-called rapid test (cassette test), performed with blood taken from a finger prick.

A reliable HIV test result can only be obtained 6 weeks after the last risk exposure (for 4th generation tests) or 12 weeks after (for 3rd generation tests). If you took the test after this period, there is no reason to worry – you are healthy.

However, if less time has passed since the last situation that could have led to HIV infection, repeat the test. Until you receive a definitive result, avoid behaviors that could put yourself or others at risk of infection.

**REMEMBER: YOU SHOULD NOT
DRAW CONCLUSIONS ABOUT YOUR PARTNERS
BASED ON YOUR OWN TEST RESULT. A NEGATIVE RESULT
ONLY INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE NOT BEEN INFECTED.
IF YOU WANT CERTAINTY ABOUT YOUR PARTNER,
ENCOURAGE THEM TO GET TESTED.**

You can skip testing only if you have never been at risk of HIV infection, which means:

- You are each other's first and only sexual partner – be sure to discuss this with your partner and, if in doubt, get tested.
- You have always used condoms during every type of sexual activity.
- You have never shared drugs, needles, syringes, or any other equipment used for taking psychoactive substances.
- You have never had direct contact with another person's blood.

**How does HIV
most commonly
get transmitted?**

1. SEXUAL CONTACT

Currently, HIV is most commonly transmitted through sexual contact (both homosexual and heterosexual) without using a condom, with a person who is unaware of their infection or not effectively treated.

Some of the most effective ways to prevent HIV infection include:

- being in a mutually monogamous sexual relationship with a partner who is not infected with HIV,
- getting tested for HIV before engaging in sexual activity with a new or unknown partner,
- using condoms during sexual contact,
- using pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

Both partners in a relationship should get tested. While waiting for the test results, condoms should always be used or PrEP taken.

Many people living with HIV in Poland are unaware of their infection – the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)

estimates that up to 30% of people with HIV do not know they are infected.

In the European Union, this percentage is around 15%.

From the perspective of HIV transmission risk, **anal sex** carries the highest risk. This is due to the greater likelihood of injury during penetration and the higher susceptibility of the rectal mucosa to infection (compared to the vagina).

Oral sex carries the lowest risk, but it is still associated with some risk, especially if there are injuries or micro-injuries in the mouth, or if other sexually transmitted infections are present.

If a mucous membrane comes into contact with infectious material (vaginal fluid, semen, pre-ejaculate, blood), rinse the mouth or eyes, or wash the skin as soon as possible to reduce the risk of infection. If ejaculation occurs in the vagina or anus, douching is not recommended, as it may cause micro-injuries to the mucous membrane and increase the risk of infection. It is best to allow the semen or other infectious material to exit naturally.

OTHER SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

If you have been at risk of HIV infection, it also means you could have been exposed to other sexually transmitted infections, such as syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis, herpes, genital warts (HPV), molluscum contagiosum, and even viral hepatitis (HAV, HBV, HCV). These infections, like HIV, can also be asymptomatic.

10 If you want to make sure that you are healthy, consult a family doctor, an infectious disease specialist, a dermatologist-venereologist, or – depending on the location of any potential symptoms – seek consultation with a urologist (urethra), gynecologist (vagina), proctologist (anus), ENT specialist (mouth, throat, larynx), or ophthalmologist (eye).

2. PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES AND ANABOLIC STEROIDS

The risk of HIV infection also exists when sharing needles, syringes, drugs, or related equipment (spoons, foil, filters) among people who inject drugs or among individuals using anabolic steroids at gyms.

The best way to prevent HIV infection is to avoid using drugs, especially when sharing needles, syringes, or related equipment. It is also advisable to consult an addiction therapist for potential treatment of substance dependence. HIV transmission can also occur through sharing banknotes or straws used for snorting drugs, as blood traces on these items may transmit HIV (as well as HBV and HCV). Orally ingested “club drugs”, such as amphetamines, ecstasy, methamphetamine, as well as alcohol, usually impair self-control and significantly increase the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors.

Sexual activity under the influence of substances may occur more frequently, condoms are used less often, people may have more partners, and sexual activity may last much longer. For these reasons, injuries to the genital organs can occur, which in turn increases the risk of infection.

How HIV is not transmitted?

In everyday situations – at home, at work, or for example on public transport – HIV cannot be transmitted. The virus is very sensitive to physical and chemical factors. It loses its infectiousness after contact with hot water or detergents (soap, shampoo, dishwashing liquid, laundry powder), and also quite quickly after drying.

The risk exists only in a few very exceptional situations, such as contact of broken skin with fresh blood in a quantity visible to the naked eye – for example, during an accident, resuscitation, or dressing wounds without gloves.

If, despite taking precautions, you come into contact with potentially infectious blood, semen, or vaginal fluids, you should seek care as soon as possible – preferably within the first few hours, but no later than 48 hours – at a clinic that provides **post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)** or at the infectious disease hospital emergency department to determine whether preventive HIV medication is necessary.

A list of facilities offering this prophylaxis can be found at <https://aids.gov/pl/co-robic/>.



The sooner the medication is started, the lower the risk of HIV infection.

How to prevent HIV infection?

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The most effective method is, of course, avoiding all risky behaviors – both sexual and those related to the use of psychoactive substances – as well as exercising extra caution when providing first aid. However, this is not always possible. What should you do then?

One method for preventing HIV infection that is worth knowing about is **pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)**. It involves taking antiretroviral medications (contained in a single tablet, taken once daily or on-demand according to medical guidelines) **before potential exposure to HIV** and for a certain period afterward. This method does not guarantee 100% effectiveness but can reduce the risk of HIV infection by **more than 99%**. PrEP is especially recommended for people who frequently engage in high-risk sexual activities. However, it is important to remember that it does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), so **condom use is still advised even while taking PrEP**.

More information can be found at <https://prep.edu.pl/>.

REMEMBER!

- An HIV test does not protect against infection. If you again engage in behaviors that could expose you to the virus, you should take the test again. It is still important to use all available protections to reduce the risk of infection.
- If, in the 6 weeks (for 4th-generation tests) or 12 weeks (for 3rd-generation tests) prior to testing, you were exposed to a situation that could have led to infection, repeat the test after that period. Until then, avoid behaviors that carry a risk of infection.
- **The best way to prevent HIV infection is to avoid risky behaviors, such as having unprotected sex or using drugs – especially sharing needles, syringes, or other paraphernalia.**

- Always check the expiration date and usability of condoms and store them properly (at room temperature, away from direct sunlight).
- Sexual activity under the influence of substances that alter consciousness (alcohol, drugs, medications) carries higher risk. Always assess the risk you are taking.
- During ordinary daily interactions at home or at work, there is no risk of HIV infection. Contact with saliva, tears, sweat, nasal discharge (runny nose), urine, feces, or vomit is not risky, unless they contain visible blood.
- Sexually transmitted infections usually increase the risk of HIV infection and require prompt treatment – consult a specialist doctor.

- Don't be ashamed to ask, get tested, and seek treatment. Most issues can be effectively addressed, allowing you to live a healthy life. Take care of yourself and your loved ones. Encourage your friends, partner, or spouse to get tested as well, for example at one of the **voluntary counseling and testing centers**, whose addresses can be found at aids.gov.pl/pkd. You can also access them by scanning the QR code below.



HIV/AIDS Online Clinic: aids.gov.pl/pi

HIV/AIDS Helpline: **800 888 448**

(call free of charge)

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