



HIV Testing in Pregnancy

About HIV

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks certain cells of the body and causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Over time the virus puts a person at risk for harmful infections and certain cancers. HIV can be spread when infected body fluids are passed from one person to another during unprotected sex, when sharing needles used to inject (shoot) drugs, during pregnancy and delivery, or while breastfeeding. Testing for HIV in the blood or saliva can tell you if you have the virus. **Many people who have HIV don't even know they are at risk.**

Pregnancy and HIV

If a woman has HIV, there is a chance she could pass the virus to her baby during pregnancy, labor, delivery, and through breastfeeding. It is important for you to know if you have HIV because treatment can help both you and your baby. **When HIV testing is done early in pregnancy, it greatly reduces the chance of a mother passing the virus to her baby.** HIV infected women who do not get treatment during pregnancy have a one in four (25%) chance of having an HIV-infected baby. Women who know they are infected with HIV and receive medication during pregnancy have a much lower risk (less than 2%) of having an HIV-infected baby. Also, treating infants exposed to HIV in the first 48 hours of life can reduce the chance that the mother will pass the virus to her baby.

HIV Testing In Rhode Island

HIV testing is part of routine prenatal testing for all pregnant women in Rhode Island, unless they refuse the test. If HIV testing was not done during pregnancy, it will be offered during labor. Women who refuse HIV testing either during pregnancy or during labor will be informed that, according to Rhode Island Law, their baby can be tested for HIV, as soon as they are born, without their consent. When HIV testing shows that a baby has been exposed to HIV during pregnancy, it means the mother has HIV and the baby is at risk for getting HIV. Infants exposed to HIV during pregnancy will be given special medications for at least the first six weeks after birth. After six weeks, more testing will be done to determine whether the baby has HIV and whether more treatment is needed. Mothers of infants identified with HIV will also require care and treatment.

HIV Test Results

A person with HIV develops antibodies to fight the virus. The HIV test looks for these antibodies in a person's blood or saliva. A negative HIV test means that no antibodies were found when the testing was done. However, if a person is infected with HIV it takes their body time to make antibodies. Testing that is done too soon after infection can give a negative result, even when a person has been infected with HIV. When a woman or her doctor has concerns about the test results, retesting can be done six weeks later.

When an HIV test is positive, a second, different blood test (Western Blot) is always done to confirm the positive result. Sometimes the first test will be positive but the second test is negative. If the second test is negative, the person does not have HIV. When the second test is positive, the person is infected with HIV.

For More Information

If you have questions or would like more information about HIV or HIV testing, speak with your doctor or healthcare professional, or:

- Call the Rhode Island Department of Health Information Line at 401-222-5960.
- Visit the Rhode Island Department of Health website at www.health.ri.gov/hiv