

HIV Testing and Care in Emergency Departments



Whether you are visiting the emergency department (ED) for an emergency or routine care and treatment, a visit with a healthcare provider is also a chance to take care of your overall health. HIV testing in the ED is quick, confidential, and a part of routine care.

Why is HIV Testing in the ED Important?

- ▶ **Easy to Access:** The ED is often the only place someone may seek care from a doctor, especially if they feel healthy, do not have insurance, or have a regular healthcare provider.
- ▶ **Early Linkage to Care:** An ED visit may be the first time someone learns of their HIV status. Testing in the ED supports early access to care or prevention services.
- ▶ **Improves Community Health:** Testing helps prevent the spread of HIV and improves the health of our community.

How is HIV Testing Done in the ED?

- ▶ **Offered as Routine:** In many EDs, HIV testing is a routine part of care, just like other blood tests. You'll be told about the test, and you can say no if you don't want it; this is also known as "opt-out" testing.
- ▶ **Collected Quickly:** The test is usually done during your check-in or as part of other blood work.
- ▶ **Recommended as Part of Overall Care:** Even if you are seeking care for other health issues like tuberculosis or substance use, the doctor might recommend an HIV test as part of your complete evaluation.

What Happens After the HIV Test?

- ▶ If the result is negative, no signs of HIV were found in your sample, and you likely do not have HIV. You may be offered HIV prevention options like PrEP, resources for safer sex, and info about routine testing schedules. If there are concerns of ongoing exposure to HIV, retesting may be recommended.
- ▶ If the result is reactive, it indicates the presence of HIV antibodies, antigens, or the virus in your blood. A provider will order a second test to confirm the result, provide counseling and support, including referrals for ongoing care.

Services are available for support, regardless of the HIV test result. The ED will be able to connect you with:

- ▶ **Peer Support and Community Health Workers:** These individuals can support you whether you're starting HIV care or exploring prevention options like PrEP.
- ▶ **Non-Medical Barriers to Accessing Care:** Stigma, mental health concerns, or difficulty getting to appointments can be barriers to accessing care. Healthcare providers can create a safe and supportive environment and help you overcome these challenges.

Getting tested and linked to care or prevention resources is important for your health and well-being.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Effi Barry Training Institute (EBTI), led by HealthHIV, provides capacity building assistance to HIV service providers, community organizations, and public health professionals in DC to advance equitable HIV prevention and care. The EBTI provides resources to support program implementation, workforce development, and community engagement.

The Power of Prevention: Community Strategies for Safer Sexual Health Series showcases groundbreaking strategies redefining the HIV prevention landscape.

This series offers DC residents clear, accessible information to take charge of their sexual health and stay protected.

This community-focused series is designed to educate and empower communities in DC with the knowledge and resources to support their wellness journey.

Need support or a clinic near you?

Scan this QR code to connect instantly with resources at dcendshiv.org. Help is here when you're ready.

