

HIV Testing

Key Changes

If a HIV point of care test is needed if the clinician is not competent in taking a POC test they should link with the Senior Nurse of the Day or GU Dr of the Day in Central or the ACNS in the connects to arrange

Background – Why it's important to test for HIV

HIV is a treatable medical condition and the majority of those living with the virus remain fit and well on treatment.

People with HIV who are unaware of their infection continue to have risk to their own health and of unknowingly transmitting HIV to others.

Late diagnosis is the most important factor associated with HIV-related morbidity and mortality in the UK.

Current BASHH guidelines recommend that all patients attending sexual health or TOPAR services should be offered an HIV test.

Who should test for HIV

All patients attending Sandyford should be given information on the availability of having a sexual health screening inclusive of an HIV test.

If there is no opportunity to test at the initial consultation, a further appointment should be offered. This is particularly important if the patient indicates a higher risk of HIV transmission. The offer and the outcome of the discussion should be documented in the patient's notes.

When a test for HIV is declined, this should be documented in the client's notes, with the underlying reason if given.

When Should an HIV Test be Obtained

All patients attending Sandyford for a sexual health screen should be tested at their appointment.

It is good practice to document the date of last sexual exposure and any significant risk since the last negative HIV result.

Patients should be informed of the window period. This is the time after infection during which the antibody response cannot be detected by the test. It is important to establish whether the person being tested could be in the window period. If they are, and do not already attend for regular sexual health screening a further appointment should be arranged or added to SC SHA Re-Test for an automated text reminder to repeat the test [HIV Window Period Guidance](#)

Blood samples sent to the virus laboratory for testing are tested by a fourth generation test. Latest guidance advises that the window period for this test is 45 days.

Other types of HIV test such as point of care may have longer window periods, the clinician must check the manufacturer's guidance for the specific test chosen.

Point of Care HIV Test

A point of care (POC) test involves using a finger-prick sample to achieve an HIV result within minutes.

An INSTI POC test can be used when clinically indicated, for instance when venepuncture isn't possible.

POC tests should only be used for patients who indicate a transmission risk from a population with a higher HIV prevalence for example, MSM, PWID or contact of someone known to be HIV positive.

Due to the lower specificity of POC tests and the resulting poorer positive predictive value there is a risk of false positive results, particularly in lower prevalence groups. Reactive POC tests should always be confirmed by a fourth generation test.

A POC test should not be used to confirm reactive HIV results from tests ordered online or via another agency.

Only staff who have attended training should perform the test. In central the Senior Nurse of the Day or GU Dr of the Day and in the Connects the ACNS are the point of contact for arranging a POC test

References

BASHH/ BHIVA/ BIA Adult HIV Testing Guidance 2020

<https://www.bashhguidelines.org/media/1246/hiv-testing-2020.pdf> accessed 07/12/2020
<https://www.bashhguidelines.org/media/1250/hiv-testing-2020-wiley.pdf>