HIV Test Drive

Tailor your test to your needs and concerns.

May 27, 2008 By Laura Whitehorn

We've seen the billboards, listened to the PSAs and heard the church announcement: June 27 is National HIV Testing Day, and black Americans are urged to get tested. As if our fears of white coats, needles and bad news weren't enough, many of us don't want others to know our business when we get tested or if our results are positive (though positive people can now live long, healthy lives). There are several testing choices. For the best support should you test positive, try a health clinic or HIV testing center; for privacy, ask if testing is confidential or completely anonymous. Or (if you're brave) try the at-home version. In all cases, a positive result requires a follow-up test, since "false positives," but not "false negatives," do occur. Here are three testing options:

	Want your doc to do it?	Want fast results?	Want to do it yourself?
Try:	The standard test (called ELISA, the initials for its medical title)	The rapid HIV test	The Home Access HIV test
How it's done:	They'll draw your blood with a needle or ask for a urine sample.	They'll run a swab through your mouth or draw blood with a needle.	You stick yourself in the finger with a needle.
Where it's done:	Doctor's office (also health clinic or HIV testing center, which may both offer more privacy).	Clinic, doctor's office, outreach center—even concerts and churches.	Your own home; you mail in a sample. (Costs about $50 at a pharmacy or homeaccess.com.)
You get results in:	1-2 weeks	Less than an hour	7 business days (3 if you use the express version)
Pros	The doc and clinic staff can provide support (and refer you to other treatment and service organizations) if you test positive.	The speediest—you get results while you wait, so you don't have to be nervous all week.	It's completely anonymous (you are identified only by a number and get results by calling for them).
Cons	You have to wait for results and return to the office to get them.	The tester delivers the results, which could be uncomfortable if you get bad news at a concert or street fair.	You have to stick yourself. And if you suffer from cold feet, you might put off calling for the results.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/hiv-test-14649-1469