



Tuberculosis (TB) and HIV

About TB and HIV

Tuberculosis (TB) is a serious condition that can affect anyone, but people living with HIV (PLHIV) are at increased risk. HIV damages the immune system, making it easier for TB to take hold. This is why people with TB are often offered an HIV test as part of their care.

What is TB?

TB is caused by airborne bacteria. There are two forms of TB:

- **TB disease (active TB):** you'll feel ill and could pass TB on to others. This type of TB requires urgent treatment with antibiotics.
- **TB infection (latent TB):** this is when TB bacteria live quietly in your body. They do not cause symptoms and cannot be passed to others. However, you can become ill with TB disease at any time, especially if your immunity is weakened.

HIV/AIDS

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. If not controlled with anti-retroviral therapy, HIV can harm your immune system. Poorly controlled HIV makes it more likely for you to get other infections, like TB.

If other illnesses take hold in this way, you are described as having AIDS. In the UK, most people with TB do not have HIV. However, in countries where both conditions are common, TB and HIV often occur together. Because the two infections are closely linked, exposure to one may suggest exposure to the other.

HIV testing

An HIV test involves taking a small blood sample from your arm to send to a lab. The test can only be done with your permission and is free of charge. HIV testing is strictly confidential to you and the staff involved in your medical care. No one else will be told the result without your permission. The result isn't shared with your partner, family, friends, employer, landlord, the government, Home Office, or Immigration Service.

Treating TB-HIV

TB can be treated with antibiotics, and HIV can be controlled with anti-retroviral therapies. However, the medications can interact with each other. If you're diagnosed with both TB and HIV, your healthcare team will closely monitor both conditions to prevent drug interactions.

Where can I get an HIV test?

You can get an HIV test at the TB clinic. You can also get tested at:

- **Your local sexual and reproductive health (SRH) clinic:** At some of these clinics, you can walk in without an appointment. They have strong confidentiality rules; your notes never leave the clinic, and staff who don't work there can't read them. The result won't be given to your GP, and you don't have to provide your real name, date of birth, or address, but you should remember the personal details you provided.
- **Your GP:** You can also get tested through your GP. However, if you make a claim, your GP may have to share a positive HIV test result with life or health insurance companies. If this is a concern, it's best to test at an SRH clinic.
- **Other clinics:** You can call the National Sexual Health Line at 0300 123 7123 to find another clinic for testing.

How long does it take to get the result?

It usually takes three working days to get the result. A healthcare professional will give you the result in person. It can't be given over the phone. Paper copies are not usually given.

What the result means

- **HIV negative:** This means you don't have HIV, unless you've been exposed to it within three months before the test. This is known as the "window" period, where the test may not be able to detect the virus. You may be advised to get another test three months after your last potential exposure.
- **HIV positive:** This means you have HIV. The result will be confirmed with a second test. You'll have a confidential meeting with an HIV/AIDS specialist who will provide information and support and arrange treatment.

Information and support

TB Alert information service: for any questions or concerns about TB, email contact@tbalert.org or call **0330 102 2403**.

You can also contact:

- National Sexual Health Line (0300 123 7123)
- Terence Higgins Trust Helpline (0808 802 1221)
- Positive Women Helpline (020 7713 0444)

Peer support: talk to others who have been through TB online at: healthunlocked.com/tb-alert. Or email contact@tbalert.org to arrange direct support.

**HIV testing
and treatment is
strictly confidential**