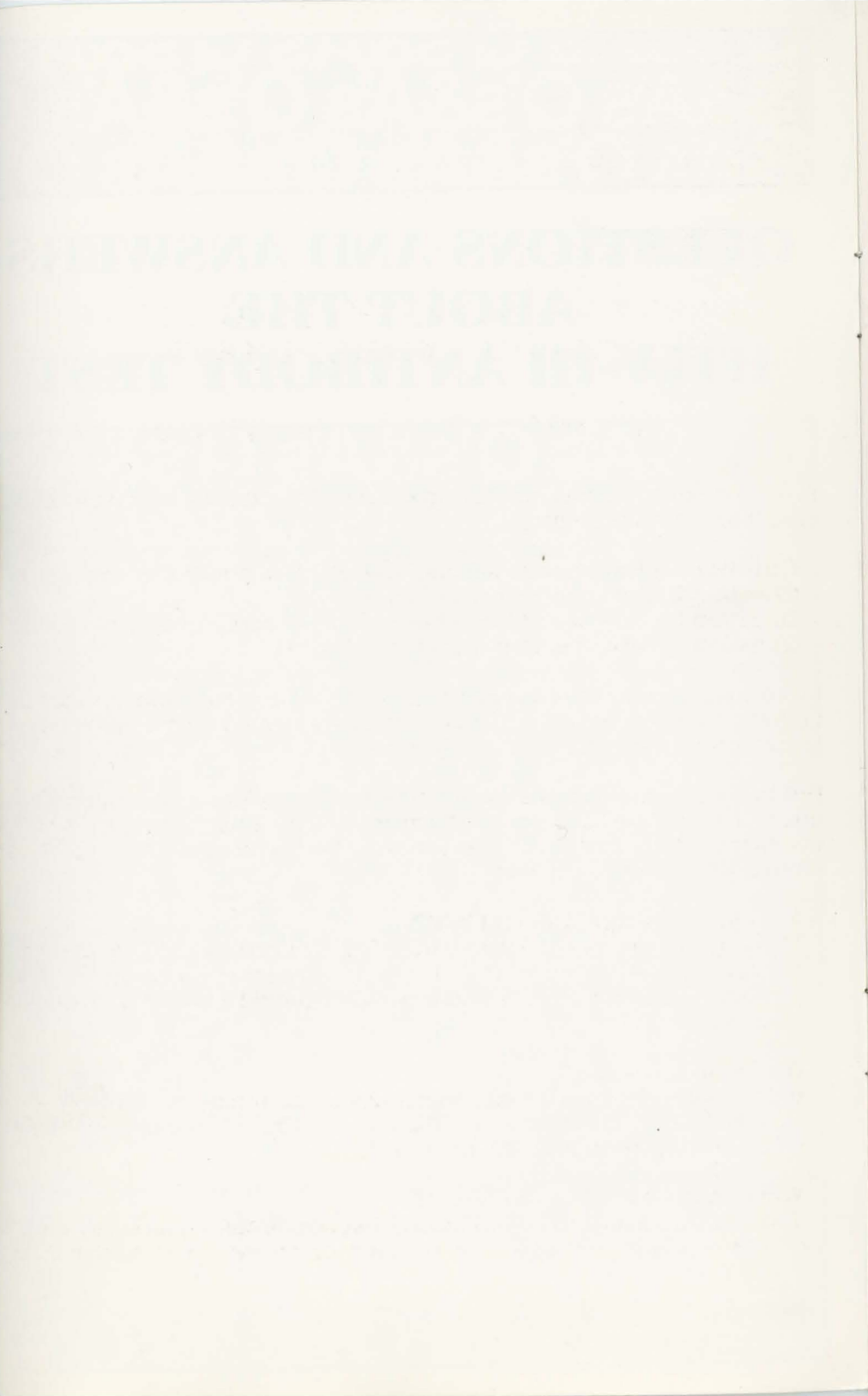


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# **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE HTLV-III ANTIBODY TEST**

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# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE HTLV-III ANTIBODY TEST

## SHOULD I TAKE THE TEST?

You are probably considering taking the HTLV-III antibody test because you have questions like these:

**Question 1** - Have I been infected with HTLV-III (the "AIDS" virus)?

**Question 2** - Am I now infected with HTLV-III?

**Question 3** - Do I have AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome)?

**Question 4** - Will I develop AIDS in the future?

In the past, you may have asked similar questions about another disease and gotten a simple "Yes" or "No" answer. You are hoping for the same type of answers from the HTLV-III antibody test.

But this test won't give you all the answers. It may give you the answer to question #1 ("Have I been infected with HTLV-III?"). This test will NOT answer questions #2, #3, and #4. The reasons why the test does NOT answer these three questions are as follows:

### **Am I now infected with HTLV-III?**

This test tells whether or not you HAVE BEEN infected with HTLV-III. It does not specify whether or not the virus is still present in your body, although present evidence suggests that a person infected with HTLV-III remains infected.

### **Do I have AIDS now?**

Being infected with HTLV-III, the condition which may be indicated by a positive test, is not the same thing as having AIDS. It is possible to have an HTLV-III infection and yet not have AIDS.

### **Will I develop AIDS in the future?**

If you have a positive HTLV-III antibody test, no one can say for sure what the outcome of such an infection will be, but doctors have noted at least 3 pos-



sibilities. AIDS, a life threatening illness, is only one of these. Two other possible outcomes are no illness and mild non life-threatening illness.

Realizing that the HTLV-III antibody test will not answer all the questions you have about your risk of getting AIDS, you may be in a better position to decide whether or not you want to take the test.

## **WHAT WILL I GAIN OR LOSE FROM TAKING THE TEST?**

You will learn your "probable antibody status" to HTLV-III: "probable"--because, this test, although very accurate in people who are at high risk for AIDS, may give occasional mistaken results; "antibody"--because this is a test for an antibody (a substance produced by your body's immune system) to HTLV-III; "status"--because you'll know where you stand with regard to previous infection with HTLV-III, the cause of AIDS. It is possible that knowing this information may help you to protect your own health and the health of others. (See guidelines below.) In this case, everyone would gain.

But possible problems could occur under this circumstance: if you take the test and have a positive result which becomes a part of your medical record, you could have trouble if this record were ever shared with employers or insurance companies. If, on the other hand, you take the test at a site where no names are asked, no one but you (and those people you may decide to tell) will know your result. After reading the information below, you should consider how knowing your test result might affect YOU, even if you have no fear of others' reactions. Only you can know if such knowledge would be a loss or a gain.

## **WHAT DOES A "NEGATIVE" TEST RESULT MEAN?**

A "negative" test result is a probable "No" answer to the question "Have I been infected with HTLV-III?" It means that no antibody to HTLV-III was detected in your blood. However, if you belong to one of the groups considered to be at high risk for developing AIDS (homosexual and bisexual men, I.V. drug users, hemophiliacs, and male or female sexual partners of persons in these groups) your negative test result could have a different meaning. Here are two other possible meanings:

Although you may have been infected with HTLV-III, it is possible that your body has not yet made an antibody to the virus.

Although an antibody to HTLV-III may actually be present in your blood, for some reason the test failed to detect it. (This is known as a "false negative" result.)

If you are in a high-risk group and have a negative test, you should carefully read the information below and consider having a second test in 3-6 months.

## **IF MY TEST IS NEGATIVE, HOW CAN I AVOID FUTURE INFECTION WITH HTLV-III?**

If your test result is negative, there is a good chance that you are not infected with HTLV-III (the "AIDS virus"). You can use this piece of good news as the starting point of a serious effort to avoid future infection, by following these guidelines:

If your risk factor for developing AIDS is that you are a man who has sex with other men, you should realize that HTLV-III (the "AIDS virus") is present in body fluids of infected people. Because HTLV-III may be widespread among Gay men, sex acts with other Gay men that expose you to their body fluids (including blood, semen, and saliva) ARE NOT SAFE. It is best also to avoid exposure to urine and feces. Unsafe acts include rectal intercourse, oral-genital contact, intimate kissing, and any other sex act you know of in which you contact body wastes or fluids of another. You cannot safely engage in these acts unless you are sure that your partner is not infected with HTLV-III. Because it is difficult to know this information about most other people, you should take some time to reconsider and modify your ways of getting sexual pleasure. For more guidance on this topic, refer to additional information on safe sex practices.

If your risk factor is I.V. drug use, you can probably guess what the first guideline for avoiding HTLV-III infection is: Get the help you need to stop shooting drugs. If you won't stop shooting, then you must stop sharing needles. Needle sharing causes you to inject a small amount of another person's blood into your body along with whatever disease-causers they may carry in their blood, including HTLV-III, the cause of AIDS. Because HTLV-III may be widespread among I.V. drug users, needle sharing IS NOT SAFE. Try to get a new needle in a sealed package, and never let anyone else use it.

If you are a heterosexual partner of a person in a high risk group, follow the guidelines for Gay men listed above and also avoid vaginal intercourse.

Never share needles with other people for any reason, including tattooing and injecting hormones for body-building.

## **WHAT DOES A "POSITIVE" TEST RESULT MEAN?**

A positive test result is a probable "Yes" answer to the question "Have I been infected with HTLV-III?" It means that you are very likely to have been infected



with HTLV-III and to have developed an antibody (a substance made by your body's immune system.) It does not tell when the infection took place or if HTLV-III, the virus that caused your immune system to make the antibody, is still present. Most important, a positive test does not mean that you now have AIDS or that you will necessarily develop it in the future.

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY HTLV-III ANTIBODY TEST IS POSITIVE?**

First of all, don't panic. Your positive test is only one part of your total health picture. You should see a doctor who can help you to evaluate your health as a whole.

Current information shows that most people with a positive antibody test do NOT have AIDS at the time of testing. At present, scientists believe that AIDS will occur in a fraction of the group of people with a positive antibody test. More will develop a non life-threatening illness, and still others may not be sick at all.

### **HOWEVER.....**

Because HTLV-III MAY BE present in your body and body fluids, you may be able to pass this virus to other people, even if you are not now ill, even if you never develop AIDS. For this reason, you should make every attempt to follow these guidelines:

Do not donate blood or plasma for transfusion, organs for transplant, or sperm for artificial insemination. If you have designated on your driver's license for your organs to be donated, you should have this designation removed.

Avoid possible transmission to others through sexual acts that expose them to your body fluids or body wastes. These acts include sexual intercourse, oral-genital contact, and intimate kissing.

Avoid sharing personal items, such as toothbrushes and razors, which can transmit the virus to other people.

If you cut yourself and spill blood on clothes or furniture, or if you need to clean surfaces soiled with saliva, urine, feces, semen, etc, wash with water mixed with household bleach (one half cup of bleach to four and a half cups of water.)

## **IF MY TEST IS POSITIVE, SHOULD I TELL ANYONE?**

After reading this brochure, you should realize that many people don't understand as much as you do about the meaning of a positive HTLV-III antibody test. Also, once you have given this information to someone else, you no longer have control over who will hear it. For these reasons, you may want to limit the people you tell to those who stand to gain from knowing:

Inform your sex partner or partners, and share with them the information about HTLV-III that you have received.

Tell your doctor and dentist. These people may be exposed to your body fluids and should know about your positive test. Your doctor may be able to help you to evaluate your test result in the context of your health as a whole. Discuss with your doctor or dentist whether this test result should be placed in your medical record to avoid unwanted disclosure of your result in the future.

## **IF MY TEST IS POSITIVE, WHAT CHANGES SHOULD I MAKE IN MY DAILY ACTIVITIES?**

Even though your test for HTLV-III antibody is positive, you do not need to change your life beyond the suggestions listed above. The following additional points may be helpful:

Contact with family and friends can be normal; hugging and kissing on the cheek does not spread the virus.

Contact with other people at work or in the community should be as usual. Special precautions and restrictions are not usually necessary. It is recommended that health care workers contact their local health department or employee health center for specific recommendations.

## **WHAT IF MY TEST RESULT IS POSITIVE AND I AM OR WANT TO BECOME PREGNANT?**

If you are now pregnant, discuss your positive result with your doctor **IMMEDIATELY**. If you intend to become pregnant, and you or your partner are a member of a high risk group, you should be tested for the HTLV-III antibody before becoming pregnant.



It is possible for a mother who has HTLV-III infection to transmit the virus to her newborn infant. Some of these infants have died. A woman who has a positive HTLV-III antibody test or who has a sexual partner with a positive test, should postpone pregnancy until the question of whether she is currently infected with the virus can be answered. Answering this question may require a test for HTLV-III itself (instead of HTLV-III ANTIBODY.) It is likely that such a test will be widely available at some future date.

## **WHAT IF MY TEST RESULT IS POSITIVE AND I BECOME ILL?**

You don't need to worry about every minor change in your health. But you should be aware of some of the "danger signals" of AIDS. These are important changes in your health which you should bring to a doctor's attention. The danger signals include:

- Unexplained fever, chills, or night sweats, lasting 2 weeks or more;
- Unexplained weight loss of 10 pounds or more;
- White patches in your mouth;
- Dry cough, unrelated to smoking, lasting 2 weeks or more;
- Unexplained diarrhea, lasting 2 weeks or more;
- Severe shortness of breath;
- Swollen or tender lymph glands in the neck, jaw, armpit, or groin;
- Any unusual bruise, bump, swelling, or skin discoloration, including skin rashes, lasting two weeks or more;
- severe confusion or change in mental status.

The sooner you bring such symptoms to a doctor's attention the better off you will be. You should have a doctor who knows about any part of your life that puts you at risk of getting AIDS. You should tell this doctor about your positive HTLV-III antibody test. If you do not already have a doctor with whom you feel you can be honest, you may be given a referral number to call when you are at the HTLV-III antibody testing site.

## **WHAT IF BOTH MY SEX PARTNER AND I HAVE POSITIVE TESTS? IS IT SAFE FOR US TO HAVE SEX?**

No one can say for sure what the risk to each of you may be in this situation. However, some scientists believe that there may be "co-factors" involved in a person's getting AIDS. (The gist of the "cofactor" idea is that there may be conditions that must be present before a person infected with HTLV-III will develop AIDS.) If such "co-factors" do exist, it might be possible for you and



your partner to pass them to each other, increasing the risk of AIDS for one or both of you. It is possible that repeated exposure to HTLV-III, or exposure to slightly differing types of the virus might also increase your risk. For these reasons, no one can advise you about the safety or danger of sex between two people with positive tests; however, you are encouraged to practice safe sex until more is known.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I DECIDE NOT TO TAKE THE TEST?

You should follow the precautions below if you are in a high risk group for AIDS, or a sexual partner or a person at high risk:

To lower your chances of getting the infection if you are not infected, or of giving it to someone else if you are infected you should use "Safe Sex" practices. These are practices which lower or stop the sharing of "body fluids" from partner to partner. "Body fluids" include blood, semen, saliva, urine, and feces. For more guidance on this topic, refer to additional information on safe sex practices.

**Limit the number of sexual partners** you have. The best way is to have sex with only one person--who only has sex with you.

**Do not donate** blood, plasma, body organs, sperm or other tissues. If you have designated on your driver's license for your organs to be donated, you should have this designation removed.

**Do not share** your toothbrush, razor, or other tools that could come into contact with your blood or secretions.

**Do not share** needles if you inject drugs.

Women should **use effective birth control** to postpone pregnancy until more is known about HTLV-III infection.

# NOTES:

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## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I DECIDE NOT TO TAKE THE TESTS

You should follow the precautions below if you are in a high risk group for AIDS. You should avoid sexual contact with a person at high risk. You should avoid sexual contact with a person who is "seropositive" (has a positive test result) for HIV. You should avoid sexual contact with a person who is not infected or is giving it to someone else if you are infected. You should use "Safe Sex" practices. These are practices which lower or stop the chance of "body fluids" from getting to another "body fluid". Examples of these practices are: using latex condoms for more guidance on this topic, refer to additional information on safe sex practices.

Limit the number of sexual partners you have. The best way to have sex with only one person who only has sex with you is to be married or to have a long-term relationship.

Do not donate blood plasma, body organs, sperm or other fluids. If you have donated on your driver's license for your organs to be donated, you should have this designation removed.

Do not share your toothbrush, razor, or other tools that could come into contact with your blood or mucous membranes. You should avoid sexual contact with a person who is "seropositive" (has a positive test result) for HIV. You should avoid sexual contact with a person who is not infected or is giving it to someone else if you are infected.

Women should use effective birth control to postpone pregnancy until more is known about HTLV-III infection.

## WHAT IF BOTH MY SEX PARTNER AND I HAVE POSITIVE TESTS? IS IT SAFE FOR US TO HAVE SEX?

No one can say for sure what the risk to each of you may be in this situation. However, some scientists believe that there may be "co-factors" involved in a person's getting AIDS. (The gist of the "co-factor" idea is that there may be some other factor besides the HTLV-III virus that is needed to start the process of developing AIDS.) If such "co-factors" exist, it might be possible for you and





# **FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AIDS AND HTLV-III ANTIBODY TESTING, PLEASE CALL**

**In Baltimore area: 945-AIDS**

**Elsewhere in Maryland (Toll free): 1-800-638-6252**

**This Center:** \_\_\_\_\_

Development of this pamphlet was a collaborative effort by:  
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