

## Features of Informed Consent for HIV Testing

**Subtitle:** A resource for health professionals

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**Summary:** A summary of best practice and a checklist of key features to include in a discussion to gain informed consent

Informed consent for testing means that the person being tested agrees to be tested on the basis of understanding the testing procedures, the reasons for testing and is able to assess the personal implications of having or not having the test performed. The person performing the test **should** use their clinical judgment in securing informed consent, including:

- The situation which precipitates testing such as clinical presentation, assessment of HIV risk and patient initiation;
- Assessment of the persons understanding of the HIV testing process and the consequences of the result as well as the implications of not being tested.

General principles of professional conduct apply in the case of HIV testing and informed consent should **not** be sought from sexual partners or family members where the person is capable of giving consent.

People offering HIV testing **should** use whatever additional supports are necessary to assist the person considering testing to become adequately informed. Interpreters should be offered and provided free of charge for people from non English speaking backgrounds. Confidentiality should be ensured and repeated throughout contact with every patient.

Protocol driven opt-out testing approaches if used, necessitate special attention to ensure those who choose not to “opt-out” are free of any form of real or perceived coercion.

Features of informed consent for HIV testing should include a discussion about the following:

- What is an HIV test? What is it testing for?
- Why the person is being offered the test?
- What are the limitations of HIV testing (window period)?
- When the results are expected?
- What does a positive HIV diagnosis means and what supports are available?
- What does a negative HIV test mean?
- Confidentiality and privacy issues regarding the results;
- What are the implications of not being tested (eg in the antenatal context)?

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