

Information Leaflet: Why should I have a test for blood borne viruses?

Who is this leaflet for?

This leaflet is for patients of NHS Tayside during whose care, blood or body fluids have been involved in an injury sustained by a member of staff.

What are the aims of this leaflet?

This leaflet will help patients understand why they are being asked to have a test for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

What has happened?

NHS staff often handle all types of body fluids and materials as well as sharp instruments. Occasionally injuries can occur – for example after taking blood the needle can accidentally puncture the member of staff's skin. Or blood could splash in someone's eye during an operation. These injuries are not your fault, and this process is not intended to cause you any distress.

What is the problem?

In very exceptional circumstances the member of staff could become infected by a virus that the patient may knowingly or unknowingly have. There is treatment that the member of staff could take to prevent some viruses however the medicine could also be harmful to them.

What happens next?

A staff member will speak to you to ask you some questions about whether you are likely to have an infection like hepatitis or HIV. Some of these questions are very personal but please don't be offended – everyone in this situation will be asked these. If any particular risk for infection is identified, then the injured staff member will start to take medicines to prevent HIV.

So why should I have an HIV test?

- If you are found not to have the virus (the test is negative), the injured staff member can stop taking the medicines.
- If you choose not to have the test, then the injured staff member will continue this treatment for 28 days. This may result in significant side-effects or complications as well as sick leave.
- If your test is positive, then it is good to know about it as soon as possible. You will have access to support and to treatment. People with HIV, who are on treatment and have an undetectable viral load, cannot pass the virus on to others and can expect a normal life expectancy.

What will I be tested for?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): HIV is a virus which can cause the immune system to fail. It can be passed by sex with an infected person, from mother to child or by sharing injecting equipment.

Hepatitis B: Hepatitis B is a virus which can cause liver damage. It can be passed by sex with an infected person, from mother to child or by sharing injecting equipment.

Hepatitis C: Hepatitis C is a virus which can cause liver damage. It is usually passed by sharing injecting equipment.

How will I get the results?

The results will be communicated to you by the team looking after your care. These are usually available within 48 hours.

Will my results be shared with anyone?

Your results are confidential which means they will not be communicated to anyone without your consent or knowledge. However, the purpose of taking your bloods is to help to identify the appropriate care pathway for the injured staff member, therefore NHS Tayside's Occupational Health (OH) Service will require to access and record your results, along with this form, both of which will be held securely by OH and will not be shared with any third party.

What if I still don't want to have a test?

You will not be tested for HIV or hepatitis against your will. We will support your choice, and your care will not be affected by your decision. You are welcome to change your mind and have a test at any point. If you would like further information, then please ask a member of staff.