



## Improved Access to HIV Testing

Why?

How?

When?

### New Patient Information — HIV testing offer

New UK guidelines recommend that HIV tests should be made more widely available in areas where more than two people in every thousand are HIV-positive. Many parts of London have levels of infection higher than this — in Camden, it is estimated that seven people in every thousand have HIV.

*Information about how the test will be done and about how and when you will receive your result will be explained to you by practice staff, who will also be happy to answer any other questions you may have.*

### We are offering all new patients an HIV test for two reasons:

- **To reduce the number of late diagnoses and improve outcomes for patients**

During the last fifteen years, very effective HIV treatment drugs have been developed. HIV-positive people who receive these drugs at the right time have an excellent chance of living a normal lifespan in good health. The treatments work best if you begin taking them before HIV has had time to damage your health.

But around half of all new HIV patients are diagnosed 'late', after the virus has already begun to cause damage. Though many of these people will go on to recover their health once they are on treatments, their chances are not as good as those of a person who starts treatments at the right time.

*If you are HIV-positive, the sooner you know, the better.*

- **To reduce the number of new HIV infections**

We know that around 25% of all HIV-positive people in the UK do not know that they have been infected. Not only is the virus progressing unchecked in their bodies, they may also be passing HIV on to others without realising. Many studies have shown that when people are aware of their HIV infection, they are usually very careful to avoid passing the virus on to anyone else.

Also, once people are on treatments, the amount of virus in their body fluids drops — often to an undetectable level. This makes them very much less infectious than they were. For both of these reasons, it is hoped that increased testing will lead to fewer new infections.

**See overleaf for the answers to some frequently asked questions**

**Please note:** You may choose to have an HIV test at a sexual health clinic instead. Their services are free and confidential and most offer a walk-in rapid HIV testing service with results in a few minutes.

You can find your nearest clinic by entering a postcode at: [www.nhs.uk/sexual health](http://www.nhs.uk/sexual-health) or by phoning Sexual Health Direct 0845 122 8690



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### Frequently asked questions:

- ***How does the test work?***

HIV tests usually look in your blood or saliva for HIV antibodies. Antibodies are a special type of white blood cell made by your immune system to fight infections. Each new infection you encounter stimulates your immune system to make an antibody to fight it.

- ***What does the result mean?***

If your result is 'positive', antibodies to HIV were found in your sample – this means you are **HIV-positive**. If the result is 'negative', no antibodies to HIV were found in your sample. If you have not been at risk in the past three months, this means you are **HIV-negative** — you have not been infected with HIV

**Please note:** It can take up to three months after exposure to HIV for your body to make antibodies. If you think you have been at risk of exposure to HIV within the last three months, you should accept the test today and, if the result is negative, have another one as soon as three months have passed since you were last at risk.

- ***What happens if the result is positive?***

If your test result is positive, you will be referred to an HIV treatment centre to have the result confirmed and to begin to receive medical and other care and support. It is in your best interests to attend your appointment, because specialist HIV doctors will then be able to monitor your health and prescribe treatments as soon as you need them.

- ***What if I'm sure I haven't been exposed to HIV?***

You may be right — and if so, your test result will be 'negative'. But the only way to know for sure is to get tested. Remember, if you do turn out to be 'positive', the HIV test could have saved your life.

Furthermore, 'negative' results are important too. When people who have been worried about HIV discover they are HIV-negative, they are able to stop worrying. Instead, they can focus their attention on making sure they stay negative.