



engaging people

IN FOCUS: The window period



HIV-negative in the window period.

One would think that HIV tests would be fairly cut and dry; either one is HIV-negative or HIV-positive. However, a negative HIV test may not be all that it appears to be.



When HIV first gets into your body, your immune system recognises it as harmful and makes special disease fighting cells called antibodies. Your body takes between 6 and 12 weeks to make these antibodies. The HIV test looks for these special cells to determine if you are infected with HIV. If you have an HIV test after you have been infected but before your body has made these fighting cells, the test will be HIV-negative, even though HIV is in your body.

This period is known as the "window period". It is important to remember that if you have HIV in your body, even if you have tested HIV-negative, you can still pass the virus on to someone else when you have unprotected sex. In fact, HIV transmission is extremely high during this period.

If you were tested before three months have passed since your last risk, then there is a chance your test results might not be accurate. So get tested again a few weeks later to make sure. If it's been over three months since the risk and your test was negative, you should be in the clear. HIV will usually show up 90% of the time after 30

days, and if you have tested negative six months after your last possible exposure, you do not have HIV.

However, a negative test does not mean that you are immune to HIV, or that you can't be infected in the future. It also does not indicate whether or not your partner has HIV; HIV is not necessarily transmitted every time you have sex. Contact the LifeAssist Care Centre on the EWP number or talk to the HCT counsellor honestly about when you have been at risk, and when you might need to get tested again.

The most important thing to do if you test negative is to stay negative. If you use needles, don't share them. It is ideal to have only one sex partner. If you have multiple sex partners or are uncertain of the HIV status of your regular partner, use a condom every time you have sex, without exception. Get tested regularly. Talk to your partner about HIV and don't be afraid to ask that he or she gets tested with you. You want to make sure that your partner knows you're watching out for his or her health too.

VOLUNTARY. PRIVATE. CONFIDENTIAL.

HIV+ does not need to be a death sentence, but you must act now. The earlier you start managing the disease, the better your quality of life.

If you want to know more about any aspect of HIV or Aids, please contact the LifeAssist EWP

0860 72 22 72 • help@lifeassist.co.za • www.yourlifeassist.co.za