

# **HIV Testing: Informed Consent**

**HIV** is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the retrovirus that causes **AIDS** (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

## **Who should be tested for HIV?**

Studies have shown that it is beneficial to test all women. Although a woman may not fit a 'high risk' category, she or her sexual partner may have practiced certain high risk behaviours. These include multiple partners, same sex partners, shared needles for IV drug use, and blood transfusions. HIV is transmitted primarily through blood exposure, but is also carried in semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk. HIV is a virus that affects all populations, communities and cultures, but women are the most rapidly growing group of people affected.

## **Why should I be tested for HIV?**

If a woman discovers that she is positive for HIV early in her pregnancy, it gives her a chance to get treatment and take steps to protect her baby. Whether you test positive or negative, the results can help you make personal decisions about your future.

## **The HIV test**

The most common test administered for HIV screening detects antibodies to the virus rather than the virus itself. This test is most commonly done with a small blood sample. This can be done at the time of your initial lab work.

## **HIV and Pregnancy**

Pregnant women with HIV can seek treatments which can help them stay healthier and reduce the chances of transmitting the virus to their baby. HIV may be transmitted in pregnancy, during the birth or through breastfeeding. Maternal antiretroviral therapy may be offered starting after the 1<sup>st</sup> trimester and has been shown to strongly lessen the risk of transmission. Treatment for HIV is handled by a physician specializing in infectious diseases. Prenatal care may continue with the midwife in conjunction with the HIV specialist, if you remain healthy and there are no complications. Public funds are available to low income women to help cover the costs of HIV care and treatments.

## **If the HIV test is negative**

The HIV screening test looks for antibodies that your body produces when you are infected with HIV. It takes between two weeks to three months after exposure to HIV for antibodies to show on a test if you have been infected. A negative test most likely means that you are not infected. However, if you were recently exposed your antibody levels may not be high enough to show on testing. A repeat test may be recommended in some cases. A discussion of self protection measures against HIV infection will be offered.

## **Confidentiality and HIV Testing**

*Birthwise Midwifery Care*  
Barbie Burrage CPM, RM, LM

By Colorado law, all HIV tests are confidential. That means only you and your health care provider know the results. However, if you test positive for HIV, it must be reported confidentially to the health department. These reports are kept strictly confidential and used to understand how the disease is

spreading. You may also choose to get anonymous testing for HIV at a local health department. This means you do not give your name and only you have access to the results. However, if the result is positive, anonymous testing cannot be used to seek treatment for you and your baby. All local health departments are required to make sure that anonymous testing is available. To locate an anonymous testing site, call the HIV Hotline at 1-800-272-2437.

***It is your right to choose whether you would like to be tested for HIV.***