

4th-generation Ag/Ab is first-line and reliable from ~18 days, definitive by 45 days. Offer testing opportunistically at every appropriate visit, test higher-risk groups more often, and don't miss acute seroconversion — it's easily mistaken for a viral illness.

WHO TO TEST

- Routine offer: new patient registration, antenatal care, any STI presentation, blood-borne virus screen
- MSM: at least annually; 3-monthly if on PrEP or with multiple partners
- People who inject drugs: at least annually; co-test for HCV/HBV; offer needle and syringe program information
- Higher prevalence: birth in a high-prevalence country, sex workers, sexual partners of a person with HIV
- Clinical clues: unexplained weight loss, lymphadenopathy, oral thrush, shingles under 50, recurrent infections, new TB

ACUTE HIV — DON'T MISS IT

- Classic seroconversion, often mistaken for a viral illness: fever, generalised lymphadenopathy, pharyngitis, a maculopapular rash on the trunk and face
- Also common: myalgia/arthritis, painless oral or genital ulcers, headache or meningism, diarrhoea, weight loss
- Symptoms 2–4 weeks post-exposure: order HIV RNA PCR directly — don't rely on 4th-gen Ag/Ab alone; viral load is often very high
- Refer same day for specialist review if neurological signs, severe pharyngitis, or profound symptoms

DIAGNOSTIC ALGORITHM

4th-generation Ag/Ab is the first-line test.

- 1 4th-gen Ag/Ab:** ELISA for p24 antigen + HIV-1/2 antibodies; window ~18 days, reliable by 45 days; no referral needed to order
- 2 Confirmatory:** if reactive, an HIV-1/2 antibody differentiation assay — most Australian labs auto-run this
- 3 RNA PCR:** if indeterminate or acute HIV suspected; detects from ~10 days; also a baseline test before ART

WINDOW PERIODS BY TEST TYPE

- **4th-gen Ag/Ab:** detects from ~18 days, reliable by 45 days — standard first-line, used by most Australian labs
- **HIV RNA PCR:** detects from ~10 days, reliable by 10–14 days — use for acute or recent exposure under 6 weeks
- **3rd-gen antibody-only:** detects from ~25 days, reliable by 12 weeks — an older test, avoid as first-line
- **Rapid point-of-care:** detects from ~18 days, reliable by 45 days — self-test kits, not Medicare-rebatable

TESTING ACCESS & RESOURCES

ASHM helpline 1800 022 226 for clinician support. No referral is required to order an HIV test. Confirm current MBS testing item numbers at mbsonline.gov.au.

■ SAFETY

- Don't rely on a 4th-generation test alone if acute HIV is suspected — order HIV RNA PCR directly, as the antibody response may not yet be detectable
- Discuss the result-disclosure process before testing, even though no specific consent form is required beyond standard pre-test discussion
- Test higher-risk groups more than once a year — 3-monthly for MSM on PrEP or with multiple partners

■ RED FLAGS / REFER

- Severe or profound seroconversion symptoms, neurological signs, or inability to swallow → same-day specialist review
- A reactive 4th-generation result → same-day referral to an HIV physician or sexual health clinic (see the companion Results & Notification sheet)
- Suspected acute HIV in pregnancy → urgent co-management with obstetrics and an HIV physician