

## **More information on HIV Self-Testing**

### **1. What is HIV self- testing?**

HIV self-testing is where a person collects his or her own specimen (oral fluid or blood), performs a HIV test and interprets the result, often in a private setting. The result of a single rapid diagnostic test such as the HIV self-test is not sufficient to make a HIV-positive diagnosis. Individuals with a positive result from the self-testing kit should receive further confirmatory testing from a healthcare provider and be referred for treatment.

### **2. Why are we introducing HIV Self-Testing in Singapore?**

The role of HIV self-testing in increasing screening rates and early detection of HIV has shown to be promising. Globally, HIV self-testing has also emerged as an empowering and discreet option for HIV testing and has shown to improve uptake of HIV testing, with the World Health Organization recommending that countries adopt HIV self-testing as an alternative to traditional HIV testing services, to increase testing coverage.

In Singapore, a large proportion of the HIV cases notified had late-stage infection at the time of diagnosis (i.e., 53% and 62% of cases notified in 2020 and 2021 respectively), and the proportion detected through self-initiated HIV screening is relatively low (i.e., 16% of cases notified in 2020 and 2021). The spread of HIV can be effectively managed through early detection and good management of the disease and more needs to be done to increase HIV testing rates in Singapore. We hope that the introduction of HIV self-testing in Singapore will increase access to testing services and encourage individuals at risk to be tested and seek further treatment if positive.

### **3. Where can we get the HIV self-test kits?**

The HIV self-test kits will be available for purchase at the Department of Sexually Transmitted Infections Control (DSC) Clinic and Action For AIDS (AfA) Anonymous Test Site (ATS) at 31 Kelantan Lane, from 1 August 2022.

### **4. How much are the HIV self-test kits?**

The HIV self-test kit costs between \$20 and \$32 dollars.

### **5. Can individuals under 21 purchase the self-testing kit?**

The kits are only available for purchase to individuals aged 21 years and above. This is keeping in line with Singapore's legal age of majority as well as the trend of new HIV infections i.e. the age group of 21 and above makes up 90% of new cases each year. The National HIV Testing Recommendations also recommend that all persons aged more than 21 years old should be offered HIV screening at least once in their lifetime.

Those who are under 21 and would like to test anonymously can do so at ten testing sites (please refer to [www.healthhub.sg](http://www.healthhub.sg) for the list of sites).

### **6. What should an individual do if they are worried about their results?**

We advise individuals who experience emotional distress and/or suicidal ideation after a positive test result, to immediately call the hotline number provided on the HIV self-testing kit.

They will be provided with further counselling and support and will also be advised to visit the DSC for further evaluation and review.

Regular testing and early diagnosis allow persons living with HIV to be treated early and achieve better treatment outcome. With early and effective treatment, persons living with HIV can continue to lead active and productive lives.

#### **7. How accurate is the test? What is the false positive rate and is it possible to get a false positive result?**

The test has a sensitivity of 92%, which means that one false negative result would be expected out of every 12 test results in HIV infected individuals. It has a specificity of 99.98%. This means that one false positive result would be expected out of every 5,000 test results in uninfected individuals.

It is extremely important for those who self-test to carefully read and follow the labelled directions. Even when used according to the directions, there will be some false negative and a small number of false positive results. Additional testing in a medical setting will either confirm a positive test result or inform that the initial result was a false positive result.

Following infection with HIV, it can take up to three months for the antibodies to develop before they can be detected by the test kits. A self-test kit performed during this three month “window period” may not be able to detect an infection. A second test needs to be performed three months after the first test to confirm the results.

#### **8. What can an individual expect from a positive and negative test result?**

If the test result is positive, it should be verified using another test performed by a trained professional to confirm an HIV diagnosis. The individual should immediately return to the site of purchase (either DSC clinic or AfA ATS) to get additional testing to confirm the test result and be linked to appropriate medical care if needed.

If the test result is negative, it does not mean that the individual is not recently infected with HIV or does not have HIV. Following infection with HIV, it can take up to three months for the antibodies to develop before they can be detected by the self-test kits. The OraQuick™ HIV Self-Test performed during this three month “window period” may not be able to detect an infection. A second test needs to be performed three months after the first test to confirm the results. If an individual has recently been engaging in behaviour that puts them at high risk for HIV infection, he/she should see a health care provider to discuss other options for HIV testing or take the test again at a later time.

#### **9. How often should an individual get tested for HIV?**

People at higher risk of HIV infection should be tested more frequently. Certain individuals may benefit from more frequent testing (i.e. 3-6 monthly) depending on their risk profiles. If an individual actively engages in behaviour that puts them at risk for HIV infection, or their partner engages in such behaviour, they should consider testing on a regular basis. It can take some time for the immune system to produce enough antibodies for the test to detect and this time period can vary from person to person

An individual should undergo HIV testing if they:

- Had been recently diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection;
- Had sex with an individual whose HIV viral load is above the limit of detection (i.e. RNA > 200 copies/ml);

- Are currently on pre-exposure prophylaxis;
- Had exchanged sex for money;
- Had a history of injection drug use or engage in sexual activities under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, or are the partners of such person;
- Had been diagnosed with or treated for viral hepatitis or tuberculosis; or
- Had more than one sexual partner since your last HIV test.

The list is not exhaustive and an individual should be tested at least once a year if they continue to be exposed to the activities listed above.

If an individual feels that they may be at risk, getting screened for HIV is the crucial first step to knowing their HIV status. Knowing their status enables an individual to receive treatment early and prevent others from getting infected.

### **More information on how to use the HIV self-test kits**

#### **What should I expect when I use a HIV self-test? What is the OraQuick In-Home HIV Test and how does it work?**

The OraQuick In-Home HIV Test kit is a single-use test that uses oral fluid to check for antibodies to HIV Type 1 and Type 2, the viruses that causes AIDS. The kit is designed to allow you to take the HIV test anonymously and in private with the collection of an oral fluid sample by swabbing your gums and using the materials in the kit to test your sample. You will be able to get a result in 20 to 40 mins.

The kit consists of a test stick (device) to collect the specimen, a test tube (vial) to insert the test stick (device) and complete the test, testing directions, information booklet and a disposal bag. There is a QR code leading to a demonstration video in the information booklet. There is also a phone number included with the self-test kit to contact either the DSC Clinic or AfA ATS if you encounter issues conducting the test. It is always important to follow the directions as described in the instructions.