

Infection prevention and control

HIV testing at The Christie

Why are tests needed?

Many of the treatments that we give for different types of cancer affect the immune system. This means that your body's usual strength to fight infections may be reduced for a number of reasons. An underlying infection, even if you are currently well, could become more of a problem as you go through treatment. This may leave you less able to cope with the side effects of the cancer treatment itself.

Why an HIV test?

Being HIV positive is an example of an underlying infection which needs to be treated alongside your cancer to get the best results. The outcome for people with HIV infection itself is much better when this is treated as early as possible. Undiagnosed HIV lowers immunity and this can affect the outcome of treatment for cancer.

Up to one third of HIV-positive people in the UK are not aware of their diagnosis. For this reason all healthcare professionals are expected to offer HIV screening tests in hospitals and in the community much more often than was done in the past. Diagnosing HIV allows treatment which is very effective and well-tolerated. Treatment also reduces the risk of transmitting HIV to partners.

We also know that some types of cancer have an increased link with HIV infection. For this reason your cancer specialist may suggest that you have an HIV screening tests as part of your general tests and investigations that will help build the best plan of care for you.

The HIV test is a requirement for any patient who is being assessed for a bone marrow transplant, and for men who want to bank sperm samples before starting their treatment.

What happens?

The test is a simple blood test. Your specialist will tell you the result, usually when you come back to clinic. If you would prefer to receive the results in a different way, please let your specialist know. The test measures antibodies to the virus that are in the blood. It takes time for these to develop, so if you think that you have been at risk in the past 4 weeks, please let your oncologist know so that they can arrange for a repeat test in another 4 weeks' time to be sure.

If the result is HIV positive, we will make sure you are referred quickly to your local specialist HIV clinic for further testing and assessment. Your cancer specialist will be talking to them so that a shared treatment plan for you can be designed to treat both conditions.

The Christie has a list of local services and we would ask you where you would prefer to be seen before contacting them. The sexual medicine specialist teams are able to give more detailed information and advice if this is needed.



Further information:

HIV treatment information base - www.iBase.info

Coping with a positive HIV test - www.nhs.uk

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

The Christie is committed to producing high quality, evidence based information for patients. Our patient information adheres to the principles and quality statements of the Information Standard. If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **the-christie.patient.information@nhs.net**

For information and advice visit the cancer information centres at Withington, Oldham or Salford. Opening times can vary, please check before making a special journey.



Contact The Christie Hotline for
urgent support and specialist advice
The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658
Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week