Are there reasons not to have a test?
In most cases it is much better to know if you have a BBV infection so you can be monitored and have any necessary treatment.
If you are depressed or really feel you could not cope with a positive result it may be better to get help with this before you take the test. But most people cope with the diagnosis even if they thought they could not.
If you have a positive test you should still be able to get life assurance, for example with a mortgage, but you may have to use a specialist company. A negative test should not affect your ability to get insurance.

Going for BBV tests
You can have confidential testing for BBVs with your GP or at the places listed below. Many agencies who work with people at risk now offer finger prick testing. It can be stressful to go alone for a test. Think about taking a friend you trust with you, especially when you are going to get the result. Think about who you would tell if you got a positive result, and who you would not tell. If you tell people you are going for a test they will probably ask about the result.
All services are confidential and will not disclose your result without your consent. In most cases you will be given the result in person – positive or negative. It is important to return to your GP or hospital to discuss your results.
You can now buy approved self-test kits for HIV. If you get a positive result from a self-test kit it is important that you contact one of the NHS services below to get your result confirmed and to discuss treatment.
You can be tested in the NHS on an anonymous basis at Chalmers Sexual Health Centre.

Contact details

**Appointments**
Chalmers Sexual Health Centre
Chalmers Sexual Health Centre
2a Chalmers Street, Edinburgh
0131 536 1070
For information on clinics held throughout Edinburgh and the Lothians access: www.lothianssexualhealth.scot.nhs.uk

HIV Counselling Clinic
Western General Hospital
Edinburgh 0131 537 2884

Blood Borne Virus Testing Clinics
Testing at various sites across Lothian.
For details contact the Community BBV Nurse team on 0131 2843/50

Waverley Care Community Projects
1-3 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh EH3 6NB
Tel: 0131 558 1425

NHS 24 (Health advice and information service)
Tel: 111 or visit the website at www.nhs24.com

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What are Blood Borne Viruses (BBV)?

There are three main blood borne viruses: HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C. They are passed between people through:

- sharing of any injecting or snorting equipment including spoons, filters, straws and water
- unprotected sex – heterosexual or homosexual
- unsterile medical treatment or unsterile body piercing/tattoos

They can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby. Treatment can greatly reduce the risk of HIV and Hepatitis B in the baby. The risk of Hepatitis C is low.

HIV and Hepatitis B are more common in men who have sex with men and in people who have lived abroad, especially in Southern Africa, the Far East and Eastern Europe. Hepatitis C is common in drug users who have ever injected. Hepatitis C is less likely to be transmitted through sex.

How do the viruses affect people?

After HIV infection someone can have a flu-like illness and then remain well for many years. The virus gradually destroys the body’s defences – the immune system – making it difficult to fight off infections. Severe damage to immunity is called AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

Hepatitis B infection can cause a mild or severe inflammation of the liver (hepatitis) with jaundice. Sometimes this can be fatal.

About 10% of people infected will have a long term infection. This gradually damages the liver causing scarring (cirrhosis) and sometimes liver cancer.

Hepatitis C infection is usually silent for many years. It also causes cirrhosis of the liver and the risk of cancer. People with the infection may feel very tired and have poor concentration. They may have a flu-like illness. If cirrhosis of the liver develops, people can be very ill and die.

What are the BBV tests?

Each virus has its own blood tests that tell us different things about the infections.

**HIV**

The first test is an antibody test detecting the body’s immune reaction to the virus. If this test for HIV is positive it means that you are infected with the virus. Other tests called the CD4 count and the viral load will be then taken to see if the immune system has been damaged yet and how much virus is in the blood.

**Hepatitis C**

The first test is also an antibody test. If this is positive another test is carried out to see if the virus is still present in the body. Up to 80% of infected people can become long term carriers of this virus with risk of liver damage.

**Hepatitis B**

A blood test works out if there is an ongoing infection. This can also show if the person has fought off the infection and is now protected against future Hepatitis B infection.

Some of these viruses take three months to show up in the blood – if you have been at risk during this time you may be advised to get a repeat test even if your first result is negative. If you have ongoing risk, you should have regular testing.

Why have a test?

Untreated all three viruses can cause serious illness and death after a long infection. In the early stages many people feel well and do not realise that they are infected. There is now treatment for Hepatitis B and C that can often cure the infection; and treatment for HIV that can control it. For HIV, treatment will be lifelong. Treatments are improving all the time.

Knowing about an infection allows you to protect your health, for example by stopping drinking alcohol if you have Hepatitis B or C. You can also protect others from getting the infection from you, by avoiding unsafe sex and not sharing injecting/snorting equipment. Women can also make choices about pregnancy and protecting their unborn child from HIV and Hepatitis B.