

BASHH/EAGA statement on HIV window period

October 2014

HIV testing using the latest (fourth generation) tests is recommended in the BHIVA / BASHH / BIS UK guidelines for HIV testing (2008). These assays test for HIV antibodies and p24 antigen simultaneously. A fourth generation HIV test on a venous blood sample performed in a laboratory will detect the great majority of individuals who have been infected with HIV at 4 weeks after specific exposure.

Patients attending for HIV testing who identify a specific risk occurring less than 4 weeks previously should not be made to wait before HIV testing as doing so may miss an opportunity to diagnose HIV infection (and in particular acute HIV infection during which a person is highly infectious). They should be offered a fourth generation laboratory HIV test and be advised to repeat it when 4 weeks have elapsed from the time of the last exposure.

A negative result on a fourth generation test performed at 4 weeks post-exposure is highly likely to exclude HIV infection. A further test at 8 weeks need only be considered following an event assessed as carrying a high risk of infection.

Patients at ongoing risk of HIV infection should be advised to retest at regular intervals.

Patients should be advised to have tests for other sexually transmitted infections in line with advice on window periods for those infections (see BASHH guidelines at: www.bashh.org).

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