

ACUTE HIV INFECTION

(Primary HIV infection, HIV Seroconversion Illness)

Acute HIV or HIV seroconversion generally takes place within 2-6 weeks of transmission. While it may be asymptomatic, many people will experience a “flu-like” illness and can present to the Emergency Department.

Have a high index of suspicion as HIV may mimic many other common illnesses.

Diagnosing HIV during seroconversion provides a unique opportunity to improve the long term health outcome for the patient and dramatically reduce the risk of onward transmission, as this is a period of high viral activity and infectivity.

Symptoms

Signs/symptoms/laboratory findings may include but are not limited to one or more of the following:

- **Fever**
- **Rash – often erythematous maculopapular**
- **Pharyngitis**
- **Lymphadenopathy**
- **Fatigue**
- **Myalgia or arthralgia**
- **Diarrhoea**
- **Weight loss**
- **Nausea/vomiting**
- **Headache**
- **Neurological symptoms**
- **Mucocutaneous ulceration**
- **Thrombocytopenia/ Leukopenia/ Elevated transaminases.**

Populations most at risk

- Men who have sex with men.
- People from, partners from or recently travelled to high HIV prevalence countries—visit <http://aidsinfo.unaids.org/> for a list of high HIV prevalence countries.
- People who inject drugs.
- NB: patients may not disclose risk factors.

Testing

Prior to HIV testing, the clinician must obtain informed consent from the patient. The level of discussion and education that is required to elicit informed consent will vary with each patient and their clinical presentation. Lengthy pre-test counselling and/or written consent are NOT required. Basic information should include: why the test is being offered; how results will be obtained and principals of privacy and confidentiality.

HIV antibody/antigen test is the current standard screening test in accredited laboratories and has high sensitivity in acute HIV infection. Repeat testing may be required for risk <3 weeks prior to negative testing.

Further Information

In the event of a positive or indeterminate result, seek advice from the Infectious Diseases department. A positive result also triggers the local HIV Support Program coordinator to call the requesting doctor and provide diagnosis support and referral into local support services. See [Ending HIV](#) for resources & information.

Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine <http://www.ashm.org.au/>.