



HIV Testing

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Box 3: Reasons for False Positive, False Negative, or Indeterminate HIV Test Results [a]

False Positive Results	False Negative Results	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced specificity associated with increased assay sensitivity • Technical errors, including specimen mix-up or mislabeling, contamination, improper handling, and misinterpretation of results • Presence of HIV Abs in recipients of HIV-1 trial vaccines • Other rare possibilities: Hypergammaglobulinemia/Abs reactive to cellular components; cross-reactivity with influenza vaccine that causes cross-reactivity with HIV Ab assays (time course for such cross-reactivity remains uncertain) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test is performed during any of the following periods: Eclipse period before detection of Ag or HIV RNA is possible; during acute infection (before seroconversion) when using a method that detects Abs only; during the early stage of seroconversion when using a method that does not detect early (IgM) Abs • Technical errors, including specimen mix-up or mislabeling, contamination, improper handling, and misinterpretation of results • Other possibilities: Delayed seroconversion due to PEP or PrEP use or ART initiation very early during acute HIV. Delayed Ab synthesis in infants or who have concurrent acute HCV infection; diminished immune response in patients receiving intensive or long-term immunosuppressive therapy; congenital or drug-induced hypogammaglobulinemia or agammaglobulinemia; insufficient host Ab response (e.g., advanced HIV disease); unavailability of Abs due to the formation of Ag-Ab complexes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual laboratories may have different internal protocols for reporting preliminary HIV test results. Indeterminate, inconclusive, nondiagnostic, and pending confirmation are among the terms used when preliminary results cannot be classified definitively • A reactive result on the initial screening test with inconclusive supplemental serologic testing may represent either a false or true positive. The laboratory should be contacted to determine the significance of the nondefinitive results and determine supplemental testing • Determining the significance of nondefinitive results is particularly important when testing pregnant individuals, newborn children, and patients with suspected acute HIV or HIV-2

Abbreviations: Ab, antibody; Ag, antigen; HCV, hepatitis C virus; IgG, immunoglobulin G; PEP, post-exposure prophylaxis; PrEP, pre-exposure prophylaxis.

Note:

a. See [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: False-Positive HIV Test Results](#) for more information.