

Health

Anonymous HIV Testing in Vermont

Free and anonymous HIV antibody testing is available through the Vermont Department of Health's AIDS program. Anyone who is contemplating testing should give serious consideration to using this anonymous system.

Being tested through the anonymous system offers several advantages. It is done entirely by code number, so your name is never attached to your test results and you retain control over who is told of them. All test results, positive or negative, are given in person by trained counselors, who can provide information, support, and referrals. It also has the obvious advantage of being free of charge.

The first step to getting tested through the anonymous system is to call the Vermont AIDS hotline (1-800-882-2437), where a counselor will talk with you about the pros and cons of being tested and help you assess your personal risk. If you want to be tested, he or she will explain the testing system to you and give you the phone number of the test site(s) convenient to you.

There are nearly twenty locations (clinics and private physicians' offices) around the state where you can go to have your blood drawn as part of the Health Department's anonymous system. You simply choose the site nearest to you (or, if you prefer, farthest from you), and call to ask for an appointment for an "anonymous HIV test." They will give you an appointment time without asking for your name.

When you go to the test site, you will receive an information packet with a code number on it. You must save this packet, because you cannot get your test results without it. This code number is attached to the single tube of blood which the testers will draw from you. The staff may also talk to you about the test and offer to answer any questions you may have.

In addition, there is an anonymous

questionnaire attached to this packet. Although it is not mandatory to complete this form, it will help give the Health Department valuable information about why people are tested and how the system can be made more responsive to the needs of those using it.

After your blood is drawn, it takes approximately two weeks for the test results to be processed by the lab and returned to the Health Department. Results are not sent or given to the clinic where your blood was drawn, but come only to the Health Department's AIDS Program office in Burlington.

At this point, you need to see one of the counselors to obtain your test results. You can set up an appointment by calling the AIDS Hotline again. Although they work out of the Burlington office, the counselors travel throughout the state, and will meet you at a place convenient for you.

If you want to get your results outside of Chittenden, Addison, Rutland, Franklin, or Grand Isle counties, you can simply call after two weeks to make an appointment. In other counties, it is best to call within a few days of having your blood drawn to set up an appointment to see a counselor in your area. Counselors will make every possible effort to meet you promptly; generally, they try to make sure that a counselor will be available within three working days of your call.

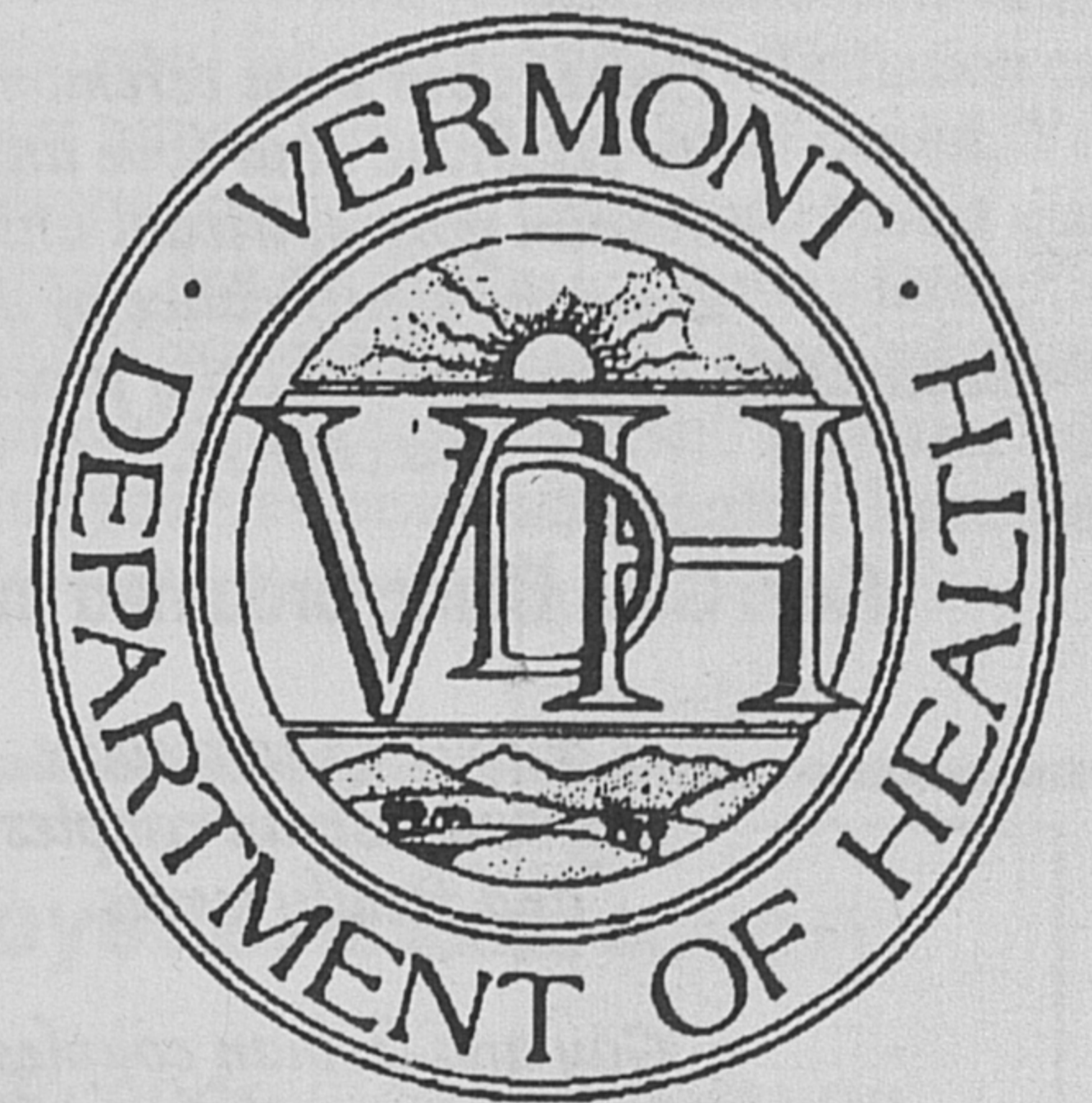
The counselors do not want to know your name. They will meet you in a place which is comfortable for you, respecting your need for anonymity. People will frequently be met in offices around the state, in cars in parking lots, in parks and public places, and, at times, in their homes. (As a general rule, counselors avoid giving results in a restaurant, bar, or other crowded public place where privacy can be limited). Any personal information (appearance,

license plate number, phone or address, etc.) which counselors obtain in the process of setting up the appointment will be destroyed after the results are given.

Counselors will explain the test results, talk with you about your reasons for testing, and offer appropriate referrals for health care, counseling, and other resources you may need. They will talk with you about safer sex and further risk reduction efforts. Whether you are positive or negative, this is a good opportunity to ask any questions you may have about your test results and what they mean.

Deciding to be tested is a difficult decision, and going through the testing process can be just as hard. The Health Department system is designed to make it as easy as possible by offering information, advice, support, and anonymity throughout the entire process.

For confidential AIDS Information



Call
1-800-882-AIDS

Safe Sex: The Board Game

Here's something on the market for those of you who like a little game-playing before going off to bed - "Speaking of Sex."

The board game is being distributed by the AIDS Project of Los Angeles to promote awareness of HIV risks and safe sex practices. The intended target audiences include high school and college students as well as church groups.

"Speaking of Sex" was developed by students at the Art Center College of De-

sign in Pasadena. Players start at opposite corners of the board and move their game pieces (in this case, little condom and dental dam figures) toward the center, where a bed and two rather androgynous triangular cartoon characters cavort over a bed. If you follow the instructions carefully, you should enjoy a "fulfilling, healthy experience" when you meet your partner in the center. Our only observation: is the board big enough to handle that?