

# Health

## AIDS and the Serious Relationship *(from preceding page)*

couples decide to go through the process. A couple considering testing should ask themselves if they are prepared to handle the results.

If you are getting tested and hoping for a negative test so you can practice unprotected sex, how will you deal if one or both come back positive? Will the relationship survive a positive test and all the stress that goes along with it?

How would you feel if your lover tested positive? Would you be supportive and want to continue the relationship, or would your fears for your own health or the uncertainty of being in a relationship with someone with HIV cause you to back off? Would you rather know or not know? How would he react if you were positive? How would you feel if he left you under those circumstances?

What if you both come back positive? Would you try to blame each other? Would you be afraid that AIDS might overwhelm your relationship, or that one of you might not be there for the other if he were to become sick? Could your relationship handle that level of intense emotion?

(A couple who both test positive should also continue to practice safer sex -

there are indications that re-infection with the virus may increase chances of developing illness. As well, unprotected sex may allow transmission of other infectious agents that may be harmful to an immune-suppressed person.)

Talk about it honestly with each other. Explore your feelings about the depth of your relationship, and how that would stand up to something as challenging as a positive HIV test.

If you decide to go ahead and get tested, you need to wait at least six months from the time that you last had any unprotected sex (or shared a needle), because the antibodies can take that long to develop after time of infection. That period is absolutely non-negotiable for the results to be meaningful - six months after the last time. For that period, you need to continue to practice safer sex and use condoms for intercourse - no shortcuts. (And if you aren't willing to wait six months, maybe it isn't that serious a relationship anyway).

Many public health people would advise you to wait another six months and then have another test before going ahead with unprotected sex. They note that even though the overwhelming majority of

people infected with this virus develop antibodies within six months of infection, a small percentage of people take slightly longer. (While the numbers cannot be precisely determined, it seems that 98 or 99% would test positive within six months). A gay man with significant risk history, especially relatively recent history, may want another test before believing those results.

If you both have negative tests, and you feel confident in the accuracy of the results, then you can fairly confidently treat all sex with each other as safe sex.

Let's face it, not every couple is ready for such a rigorous procedure, but if you decide not to be tested, or if you have "discordant" (one positive, one negative) tests, or both have positive test results, you can still remain sexually active within your relationship. Safer sex does not mean no sex, and your physical, emotional and romantic relationship can still develop and grow with the security offered by safer sex. When you are really in love, is a little piece of latex really that big an obstacle?

Part of the AIDS epidemic has involved learning how to protect and take care of each other. That lesson needs to include those closest to us - our lovers.



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