

Unit 6

Frequently Asked Questions about vaccine antibodies & VISP

Antibodies prevent infection. Most vaccines cause the body to make antibodies. If you get an HIV vaccine, your body may make antibodies to HIV. Standard HIV tests search for HIV antibodies as a sign of infection. Because of this, your HIV test results could come back positive even if you are not infected with HIV. This is called a VISP (Vaccine-Induced Sero-Positive) test result. You may also see this called Vaccine-Induced Seroreactive test result.

Where can I get the "right" test for HIV?

You can get the right HIV test through the study site for free for as long as you need it, even if you leave the study or the study has ended.

Why don't standard HIV tests look for actual HIV?

Standard HIV tests that look for antibodies are quick, reliable and affordable. Tests that look for the virus are expensive and not commonly used for an initial diagnosis.

Does having VISP mean I'm protected from HIV?

NO. Until there is a licensed vaccine, it is important that you continue to use proven HIV prevention methods.

How will a VISP test result affect me?

If someone believes you are infected with HIV, you could face discrimination and/or other problems. For example, you could have problems with medical or dental care, employment, insurance, a visa for traveling, or entry into the military. If you are planning to apply for insurance, employment, or military service, inform your study site right away. The HVTN can work with them to ensure the right test to will show your true HIV status.

What if I want to donate blood or organs?

In order to donate blood or organs, the donation site will screen you using an HIV antibody test. If you test positive for HIV antibodies you may be unable to donate an organ. You may also be permanently banned from blood donation even though you are not infected with HIV.

How long does VISP last?

If you have tested VISP, the antibodies may fade quickly or they may last for several years. In some cases, participants continue to test VISP for more than 20 years.

How can I explain VISP to my healthcare provider?

- If anyone asks to test you for HIV or to draw your blood, tell them you are in (or have been in) an HIV vaccine study and you need to get all your HIV tests at the study site.
- Explain that being tested outside of your study site or with the wrong type of testing could result in an incorrect diagnosis of HIV infection.

- Give the provider your study coordinator's contact information. Ask that the provider call the study site. If you have to, simply say "no" to the HIV test, and then ask the study site or the HIV Vaccine Trials Network to help.

Can VISP be passed from one person to another?

In most cases, no. If you have tested VISP you cannot pass the antibodies to another person by kissing or participating in sexual contact. If you are pregnant, there is a chance that you may pass the vaccine antibodies to your baby. This happens with other vaccines, like the tetanus vaccine, but the antibodies from the mother are temporary and go away over time. The HVTN can arrange for you and your baby to have accurate HIV testing for free for as long as it is needed.

How common are VISP results?

They vary by study vaccine. As of 2021, approximately 52% of participants in HVTN vaccine protocols has VISP at the end of the study. (Data: Nicole Espy, Diagnostics Project Manager) But specific studies can have much higher rates. For example: HVTN 100: 0% - 0.5% depending on study group; HVTN 702: 0%; HVTN 075: 97% - 99% depending on number of vaccine doses. (Data: Nicole Espy, Diagnostics Project Manager)