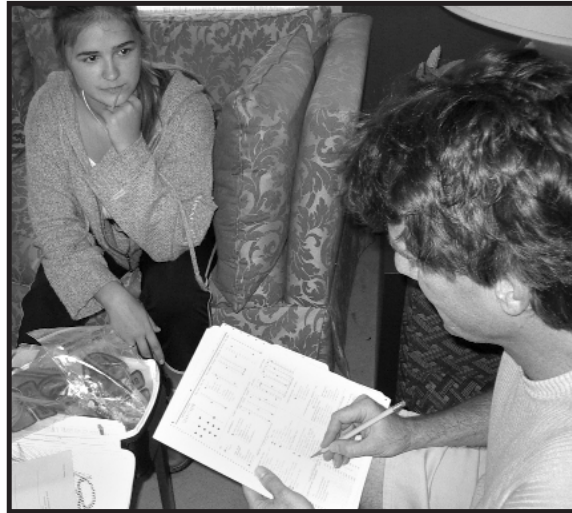


What HIV testing was like for me

Getting an HIV test is an emotional experience. You arrive for the test, wait for your paperwork to be completed, and then go to a private room with a test counselor. During the counseling session you share intimate details about your sexual activity, and express any concerns or fears you have. Of course, no one can yet answer the most important question: "So am I HIV positive?" Finally, you set an appointment to get the test results. Then you wait. For two nerve-wracking weeks. On the day you are scheduled to return you imagine what you will say if your result is positive. You imagine what you will tell your loved ones, or if you can tell them at all. How will my life change? you wonder. You begin to feel afraid, and instruct yourself to snap out of this bizarre day-dream. Probably, you try to convince yourself, the result is negative. But the anxiety continues to hover in the back of your mind, and you feel strangely light-headed as you drive to the test site for your results.

This is what the HIV testing experience can feel like. In 1998 the Utah AIDS Foundation opened an HIV testing site at our office, because many people at high risk for HIV infection reported feeling uncomfortable going to one of the existing HIV test sites. Instead, they wanted a place that felt safe, friendly, and completely non-judgmental. Now, more than half of the people who visit the UAF test site report that they chose our site because a friend had previously had a comfortable experience with us. Here are some of their stories:



UAF Test site volunteers practice their counseling skills.

"So am I HIV positive?"

- "Before I came to UAF I had one really negative experience at a health department where the counselor was judgmental and tried to make me feel bad about being responsible for being sexually active. I decided not to go back there again, because I don't think I should have to feel guilty about being tested. I think it's important for testing and counseling to be positive. There are people out there who are afraid to be tested because of judgmental attitudes."

- "Many years ago, before I came to UAF as a volunteer, I had a really horrible experience. When I showed up and went into the testing room I could hear the staff whispering outside the door saying, 'It's an HIV test... she's here for an HIV test... did you know—HIV.' I ended up feeling like I'd done something wrong—like getting an HIV test

somehow marked me as a bad person. That experience affected me so much that I was determined to learn more about HIV and to get involved in a positive way, so that other people wouldn't have to feel the way I did. That's how I found UAF."

- "I remember when I got tested somewhere else a few years ago. I spent the two weeks before I got my results agonizing about it. I kept trying to put it out of my mind, but I just kept thinking 'what if I'm HIV positive?' and freaking out. When I finally went

Continued on back. See TESTING

Perspectives

Why is HIV testing important?

HIV testing is often the only chance we get to educate people, especially one-on-one, about HIV. Early detection of HIV is also very important; not only for treatment, but also for preventing the spread of HIV.



Tyler Fisher, UAF Staff

HIV testing is important on many levels. Firstly, HIV is a medical issue. Early detection and treatment can prolong life and add to an HIV-positive person's quality of life. Secondly, the act of seeking HIV testing and counseling may instill accountability of one's behavior and empowerment of one's health.



Rob Sonoda, UAF Test Site Volunteer

The only way to know your HIV status is to be tested. Knowing your HIV status allows you to make informed decisions about your health, your behavior and your relationships. Being tested changes "at risk" to "being responsible."



Dennis Ullom, UAF Board of Trustees

TESTING: Continued from front

for my results I sat in the parking lot for a long time before I went inside, trying to calm down. Luckily, my results were negative, but I still left feeling miserable, because the counselor lectured me about how lucky I was and how I'd better commit to 'improving my life.' She was just really cold and uncaring."

HIV testing continues to be an extremely emotional experience for those who are being tested. It is important to us that our clients, especially those who are involved in highest-risk activities, feel like UAF is a place they are comfortable returning to when they want to be tested again. UAF test site counselors are trained to listen and dialogue with those being tested, to help them seek their own solutions, and to support everyone who visits.

HIV testing is becoming more and more important, as it becomes increasingly clear that early detection of HIV infections facilitates the ability to effectively manage this disease over the long term.

Rapid HIV Testing

In September the Utah AIDS Foundation will begin offering the newly developed "rapid HIV test." Rapid testing means that instead of waiting two weeks to get your result, you'll get it in only twenty minutes. Sounds good, right?

Here's how the rapid test works:

- We'll prick your fingertip, in order to draw a few drops of blood.
- We'll collect a drop of blood and submit it to the same screening laboratories use to test for HIV.
- In 20 minutes, you'll know your result.

The rapid test UAF will use is called OraQuick, and is the only FDA-approved rapid test available. OraQuick is just as accurate as the test we currently use.

To learn more about rapid HIV testing call the Utah AIDS Foundation at 801-487-2323, or visit the OraQuick website at www.orasure.com

Did you know...

- In 2002 UAF tested 359 individuals for HIV
- 21% of those tested belong to an ethnic minority
- UAF tested 145 people at the 2003 Gay Pride Festival
- 68% of UAF test site clients are men who have sex with men
- 28% UAF test site clients have never been tested before
- 5% of UAF test site clients are injecting drug users
- UAF uses the OraSure HIV testing system. This is an oral HIV test that is just as accurate as a blood test, but does not require a blood draw.

FREE HIV Testing During June

June 27 is National HIV Testing Day, and the Utah AIDS Foundation is offering free HIV testing throughout the entire month of June.

Free HIV testing will be available at these times:
Any Monday evening in June between 5:00 PM and 7:00 PM, at the Utah AIDS Foundation (1408 South 1100 East)

At the UAF booth at the Pride Festival on June 8th

**Utah AIDS
Foundation**

It's who we are.

At the Utah AIDS Foundation we strive to help individuals, families, friends, and communities as they struggle with the complex issues surrounding HIV, because we believe that no one should have to confront this disease alone. As we work side by side with community members, for as long as we are needed, we are committed to partnerships that mend health, promote compassion, and extend companionship to everyone who has been impacted by HIV.

Utah AIDS Foundation Phone (801) 487-2323
1408 South 1100 East (800) 865-5004
Salt Lake City, Utah 84105 Fax (801) 486-3978
www.utahaids.org

This coupon is good for one

Free HIV Test

at the Utah AIDS Foundation

Good any Monday evening between 5:00 PM and 7:00 PM at
UAF (1408 South 1100 East)

Questions? Call Tyler at 487-2323