What is the HIV test?

An HIV test detects whether or not there are HIV antibodies present in the blood. Antibodies are produced in reaction to the virus and their presence tells somebody whether he or she has been infected with HIV.

The HIV test does NOT test for AIDS. AIDS can only be diagnosed by a doctor.

The HIV test involves taking a blood sample, which is then sent to a laboratory. The result will be made available between one-hour time and one week. The person concerned should give him- or herself sufficient time to think about taking the HIV test or not carefully.

A negative result means that antibodies have not been found in the blood. It takes approximately 3 months - after becoming infected - for antibodies to develop and show up in a test.

A positive result means that antibodies have been found in the blood. This means that the person is infected with HIV for the rest of his or her life. The result does not give any indication however, when a person will go on to developed AIDS.

Employers and employees should always keep in mind that taking an HIV test is a personal decision of the employee only.

Companies should never conduct mandatory HIV testing

There exist 8 reasons why companies should never decide to conduct mandatory pre- or post employment HIV testing.

1. Compulsory HIV testing is against (inter)national law and/or government policy.
2. One can get HIV anytime.
3. Lost opportunity to hire a good worker.
4. HIV employees do not pose a threat to other co-workers.
5. Test results place unnecessary burdens and stress on management.
6. Showing empathy with staff.
7. Voluntary testing always has more positive effects.
8. Possible negative impact on corporate image.

1. Compulsory HIV testing is against (inter)national law and/or government policy

Mandatory HIV testing often is conflicting with national and international laws, such as the constitution, criminal laws and civil laws. This is because mandatory HIV testing is a breach of a person's right to keep medical information confidential to him- or herself.

In many countries, mandatory HIV testing is recognized as an abuse of fundamental human rights.

Mandatory HIV testing is unlawful because it infringes an individual's right to: - Confidentiality of medical information. - Equal access to employment. - Non-discriminatory treatment at the workplace.

For example, the national AIDS committee of Thailand has stated that HIV testing must be voluntary and any results must be confidential between a client and a doctor only.

2. One can get HIV anytime

HIV testing does prevent or protect employees from contracting HIV in the future. A negative test result (one is NOT infected with HIV) often does not change a person's risky behavior. HIV testing therefore provides no guarantee at all for future HIV infections.
Besides, based on present technology, HIV can only be detected after 2-3 months of infection. Therefore, if any company will need to screen HIV infected staff out, they may need to conduct compulsory testing every 2-3 months! This is of course not to the usefulness of such management at all.

3. Lost opportunity to hire a good worker

Compulsory HIV testing will effect high potentials' decision to apply for positions at such companies. Many people do not want their employer to conduct HIV testing as they believe rightly that knowing one's HIV status is a private matter. Besides, some argue that they do not want to know their HIV status at all. They find it difficult to continue a normal life, when knowing that there does not exist a medicine or vaccine for HIV. Many people who are confronted with a HIV infection, are not able to make the psychological adjustments. This will have a direct impact on one's lifestyle and productivity.

At last, compulsory HIV testing provokes negative reactions from potential job applicants as they do not trust companies to be able to keep medical information confidential or to ensure non-discriminatory treatment of HIV staff.

4. Working with colleagues who have HIV is safe

Working together does not transmit HIV. It is as simple as that. HIV infections do not result in the ability of working at the non-symptomatic stage. In most cases, this stage will be last for several years. Besides, most opportunistic diseases, contracted by HIV infected employees, are no threat to the health of other co-workers.

5. Test results place unnecessary stress on management

Compulsory testing puts management under severe stress, as unskilled managers usually do not know how to inform staff about test results, how to take care of HIV employees and how to guarantee confidentiality at all times.

Looking back to the time before conducting the test, everybody worked together peacefully in spite of the fact that there were already HIV infected employees. The feeling of the management will be worse if they express a wish to help, but nobody comes to ask for their help.

6. Showing empathy with staff

Before conducting involuntary HIV testing of your staff, ask yourself first whether you would feel comfortable or not if someone knew your HIV status? Probably not. Your staff neither.

7. Voluntary testing always has more positive effects

Many countries, which have implemented voluntary testing, have experienced that voluntary HIV testing encourages change of risk behavior better than does compulsory testing (Poolchareon et al. 1997: 3). Furthermore, if people know their HIV status earlier by voluntary blood testing they will better be able to manage their living with HIV. For example, they will be able to prevent themselves from opportunistic diseases and they will practice safer sex. These advantages of knowing the HIV status do not belong to compulsory blood testing. Oppositely, results of compulsory tests may even cause suicide and homicide.

8. Negative impact on corporate image

The 45th World Health Assembly came to the very clear consensus that HIV blood testing should only be conducted based on individual freedom of decision, freedom of living in a society and the right of keeping personal secrets. Any company conducting compulsory HIV testing might be blamed by society that the company violates basic human rights.
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