If your test result is negative...

If your HIV test is negative, no sign of infection was found in your blood. This usually means you are not infected.

However, there is still a small chance you could be infected. This is because the HIV test measures antibodies, substances produced by your body as it tries to fight HIV.

These antibodies may not show up for several weeks or even several months after you are infected. Until the antibodies are detectable, you can be infected but have a negative test.

Your healthcare professional or counselor can help you decide if you should be retested and when.

Protect yourself

Even if your test is negative, talk to your counselor or healthcare professional about ways to protect yourself and your baby. Activities to be avoided include having unprotected sex with someone who may be infected with HIV and sharing needles or syringes during IV drug use.

If your test is positive...

If your HIV test is positive, it means you probably have HIV. You should see your doctor or healthcare professional right away to discuss your options and protect your health and your baby’s health.

HIV treatment can help

Today, there are effective medications your healthcare professional can give you to fight HIV and help you live a longer, healthier life. These medications can also help to protect your unborn child from becoming infected. Remember, though, that HIV medications must be used in combination, do not cure HIV infection/AIDS, and do not prevent passing HIV to others.

National guidelines say pregnant women should receive the same type of treatment as all other people with HIV.

Therapy with RETROVIR® (zidovudine)

One medication to fight HIV, RETROVIR (also known as AZT), is known to help reduce the spread of HIV from mothers to their babies.
A large, closely supervised clinical study found that women with HIV who took RETROVIR during pregnancy were much less likely to pass the virus on to their babies. (Babies also took RETROVIR for 6 weeks.)

Treatment with RETROVIR can lower the chance that your baby will get HIV from about 1 in 4 (25%) to 1 in 12 (8%). Ask your doctor if RETROVIR is right for you.

For the baby, the most common adverse event is a temporary decrease in red blood cells. For the mother, the most common adverse events associated with AZT are headache, nausea, and fatigue.

Make sure to see your doctor regularly because serious side effects such as muscle damage and a decrease in red and white blood cells can occur. A build-up of acid in the blood and liver damage, including fatal cases, have been reported with some HIV drugs.

Changes in body fat may occur in some patients taking antiretroviral therapy. These changes may include an increased amount of fat in the upper back and neck ("buffalo hump"), breast, and around the trunk. Loss of fat from the legs, arms, and face may also occur. The cause and long-term health effects of these conditions are not known at this time.

A healthy delivery

Some doctors believe planned cesarean section delivery (C-section), when combined with HIV drug treatment, can further help prevent mother-to-baby transmission of HIV. But there are risks. Only you and your doctor can decide if a C-section delivery is right for you.

Do not breast-feed

If you are HIV positive, do not breast-feed, because it's dangerous for your baby. Your baby can get HIV infection or reinfection from breast milk. Bottle feeding with infant formula will help protect your baby's health.

If you have other children

Just because you are HIV positive doesn't mean your children are. But they should be tested as soon as possible to make sure.

If you are already being treated for HIV

Make sure your doctor or healthcare professional knows you are pregnant as soon as you find out. This is very important.
Your treatment may need to be changed.

Prevent the spread of HIV

Your counselor or healthcare professional should talk to you about avoiding behaviors that can spread HIV to others. Remember — never have sex without a condom, and never share drug needles or syringes.

Telling your partner

Your counselor or healthcare professional may talk to you about telling your sex partner(s) and/or drug-using partner(s), if any, that you have HIV. Letting partners know you are HIV positive may encourage them to get tested and receive treatment if they are infected. They can also get counseling about ways to prevent the spread of HIV.

If you are worried that you will be in danger if your partner finds out, discuss the situation with your healthcare professional, counselor, or social worker first.

Other "positive" steps you can take

Besides taking medications for HIV, there are other ways you can protect your health and the health of your baby:

- Get prenatal care early and often in your pregnancy
- Exercise regularly if your healthcare professional says it's okay
- Eat healthy meals
- Get enough rest
- Do not use alcohol or any drugs your healthcare professional did not prescribe
- Do not smoke