

[National AIDS Treatment Advocacy Project](#)

ACCESS PROGRAMS TO VIRAL LOAD TESTING FROM CHIRON AND ROCHE

Both Roche Diagnostics and Chiron Corporation have established Patient Assistance Programs (P.A.P) for individuals who are unable to access insurance reimbursement for the tests through other means.

The Roche PCR test was approved by the FDA in the Summer of 1996 and the Chiron bDNA test is currently being reviewed for approval by the FDA. Roche's test can measure viral load to a lower level of detectability of 400 copies/ml. Chiron's 1st generation test measures only down to 10,000 copies/ml; but, their 2nd generation test measures down to 500 copies/ml. The FDA is reviewing approval for both the 1st and 2nd generation tests. For more information about viral load testing--its use and limitations-- you can read on NATAP's web site -- [Perspectives On Viral Load and When to Initiate Therapy](#). This 20-page document is also available in a printed booklet published by NATAP. Included are the International AIDS Society's interim guidelines for using the test and interpreting its results. If you want a printed copy of this booklet contact NATAP through by e-mail (JuLev@aol.com) or you can call us at 212 219-0106.

These two viral load access programs are meant to make viral load testing available to those who cannot afford it or do not have insurance coverage for the testing.

At this moment the Chiron program is available only in San Francisco and will be made available through the San Francisco Department of Public Health. Eligibility for free testing is supposed to be determined by Department Of Public Health criteria. There are 8 locations (see below for list) within San Francisco, where you can go for testing. You must call first for an appointment. Chiron has said they are in the process of arranging similar programs in other cities: Boston, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Houston, Miami.

For information about the Chiron test program and San Francisco locations, you can call toll-free **1-888-HIV-LOAD**.

Beginning January 1, 1997, the Roche Patient Assistance Program was started. Roche is offering a total of 50,000 free tests during 1997 to qualified individuals, regardless of where you live. If you have not received baseline viral load testing, you can receive two free baselines tests through this program. If qualified, these individuals will be offered three additional free tests during the course of the next year. Others will be permitted up to three tests during the course of the year.

For information about the Roche PCR test program, you can call toll-free **1-888-TEST-PCR**.

You can call this the Roche 888 number to start the enrollment process; an application form will have to be submitted. Application forms are supposed to be available at your

doctor's office, or you can request it be sent directly to you. The patient's eligibility will be reviewed over the phone and an application is promised to be mailed within 24 hours to the physician. Roche says upon receipt of the completed application, determination of eligibility can usually be made within 24 hours. Both the patient and doctor will receive a letter of approval and a voucher for a free test. When desiring the next test, the patient will have to re-apply for qualification. The qualification review process will assist in determining if a patient has alternative reimbursement; and, will be directed to them.

If you are in San Francisco and are interested in participating in the Chiron program, you can call the following sites directly to make a test appointment:

- Haight Ashbury Free Clinic 487-5632
- Lyon-Martin Women's Health Services 565-7667
- Mission Neighborhood Health Center 552-3870
- South of Market Health Center 626-2951
- Castro-Mission Health Center 487-7500
- Maxine Hall Health Center 291-1300
- Tom Waddell Health Center 554-2940
- Ward 86 at SF General Hospital 476-0828

Two other important NATAP published booklets that are available:

- "Protease Inhibitor Users Guide"-- a 30-page compliance manual: side effects, drug interactions, dosing, storage, viral load monitoring, etc.
- "HIV Protease Inhibitor Report 3rd edition"--a 50-page up-to-date compilation of data for 5 protease inhibitors; mutation/resistance charts for each protease inhibitor, side effects, efficacy data.