

Getting People to Know Their HIV Status

Why should we focus on HIV testing?

- **Testing saves lives.** Getting diagnosed early can make HIV easier to treat and easier for a person to stay healthy. A late diagnosis can limit the ways that HIV/AIDS can be treated and can lead to unnecessary death. Testing shouldn't be put off; the sooner HIV is diagnosed, the better.
- **HIV is not a death sentence.** Living and living well with HIV requires that a person work closely with a healthcare provider to monitor the effects the virus is having on their body. At some point, medications (antiretroviral drugs) may be needed to keep the virus at bay. Many people have been living with HIV for a very long time and continue to do well with the help and support of care providers, family, and friends.
- **Knowledge of HIV Status Lets People Protect their Partners.** When people know they have HIV, they can protect others from becoming infected. Knowing makes all the difference.

What are we doing in Sacramento?

Like every other major city in America, Sacramento has several agencies that specialize in HIV testing. These organizations focus on specific populations: gay men, African American gay men, injection drug users, sex workers, those who are mentally ill, Latinos and other targeted groups. Sacramento County provides funds many of these organizations.

Testing also takes place in hospitals when a patient's condition warrants testing. Perhaps half of the annual positive test results are found in this setting. CARES, the full service HIV clinic, tests the sexual and needle sharing partners of its patients and also finds a significant number of previously unknown positive people.

What is the ideal for HIV Testing?

The CDC recommends that HIV testing become a routine part of medical care, like testing for other common ailments. In 2006, the CDC revised its recommendations to include:

- HIV screening for patients ages 13 to 64 in all healthcare settings after the patient is notified that testing will be performed unless the patient declines (opt-out screening).
- HIV testing of people at high risk for HIV infection at least once a year.
- Screening should be incorporated into the general consent for medical care; separate written consent is not recommended.
- Prevention counseling should not be required with HIV diagnostic testing or as part of HIV screening programs in Healthcare settings.

Implementing these recommendations was advanced in California with Governor Schwarzenegger's signature on AB 1894 to require all insurance companies to cover the cost of HIV testing as a routine part of medical care. This new legislation went in to effect on January 1, 2009. But while this is a huge improvement, people without insurance will not be covered under this act.

What are the issues we need to address when it comes to HIV testing?

- How can we realistically provide enough testing to find those infected?
- How can we increase testing among at risk populations effectively and efficiently?
- How can we get testing in emergency rooms, community clinics, and by all providers when an STD is diagnosed?
- How can we best convey the need to test in specific communities?

HIV Testing Information

CDC Resources on HIV Testing

<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/testing/index.htm>

The Role of STD Detection and Treatment in HIV Prevention - CDC Fact Sheet

<http://www.cdc.gov/std/hiv/STDFact-STD&HIV.htm#WhatIs>

Changing the Paradigm for HIV Testing—The End of Exceptionalism [editorial]. *New England Journal of Medicine*

<http://content.nejm.org/cgi/reprint/355/7/647.pdf>

HIV Counseling and Testing: Less Targeting, More Testing [editorial]. *American Journal of Public Health*

http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/testing/healthcare/pdf/Koo_article.pdf

Applying Public Health Principles to the HIV Epidemic. *New England Journal of Medicine*

<http://content.nejm.org/cgi/reprint/353/22/2397.pdf>

HIV testing should no longer be accorded any special status [editorial]. *British Medical Journal*

<http://bmj.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/full/330/7490/492>