



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
Oxiris Barbot, MD  
*Acting Commissioner*

## Promoting the Sexual Health of Latino Men Who Have Sex with Men

### Summary

The New York City Health Department encourages health care providers to support the sexual health of Latino men who have sex with men (MSM). We ask you to:

1. Provide a **welcoming environment** to encourage Latino MSM to seek care and disclose their sexual history.
2. Offer **regular screenings** and appropriate treatment for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
3. Screen men for HIV risk and **discuss PrEP** (pre-exposure prophylaxis) as an HIV prevention option, particularly with men who express interest in PrEP or have a recent diagnosis of a bacterial STI.
4. Counsel men, regardless of HIV status, about how HIV treatment can quickly reduce one's viral load to **an undetectable level**, which protects the health of people with HIV and their sexual partners.

December 10, 2018

Dear Colleague,

Latino men who have sex with men (MSM) – whether they identify as gay, straight or bisexual – are a priority population for sexual health. New diagnoses of HIV are [decreasing in the United States](#) but are [increasing among Latino MSM](#). In New York City, Latino MSM are increasingly diagnosed with HIV and now receive [over 20 percent](#) of all new diagnoses in the city. At the same time, diagnoses of [other STIs](#) are increasing among men in New York City. To address these ongoing health crises, the New York City Health Department recently launched a second wave of our “*¡Listos!*” marketing campaign, which encourages Latino MSM to seek HIV and STI testing and treatment, and PrEP to prevent HIV. Below are actions you can take as a health care provider to actively support the sexual health of Latino MSM.

**Create a welcoming clinical environment:** Comprehensive sexual health care requires that men disclose whether they have sex with other men. But Latino men are [less likely](#) than White men to disclose their sexuality in medical settings. To encourage patients to open up about [their sexual history](#):

- Provide patients with multiple opportunities to disclose the gender of their sexual partners.
- Avoid judging or appearing to disapprove of patients' sex lives. Language choice can make a big difference in a patient's level of comfort, but nonverbal cues are equally important.
- Go beyond clinical risk assessment and emphasize ways to have a healthy, worry-free sex life.
- Display images or messages that signal to LGBTQ patients that they are in a welcoming space.

A welcoming clinical environment can include patient education materials in Spanish (such as the [New York City LGBTQ Health Care Bill of Rights](#)), and culturally responsive medical providers and support staff who speak Spanish in its different regional forms (such as Caribbean, Mexican, and Central and South American). Latinos who are undocumented or uninsured may also benefit from clear messages about confidentiality and the availability of financial assistance for [HIV treatment](#), [PrEP and emergency PEP](#) (post-exposure prophylaxis).

**Offer regular screenings:** MSM can benefit from more frequent sexual health screenings. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), all MSM should be tested for [HIV](#) and [other STIs](#) at least once a year. MSM may also benefit from testing as often as every three or six months, depending on their sex lives and condom use. Regular, frequent testing allows for prompt initiation of treatment for both [HIV](#) and

other STIs, which protects patient health and reduces transmission to others. Acknowledge that an HIV test can be a moment of anxiety, but let patients know that testing can also relieve anxiety. Since STIs often show no symptoms – particularly in the throat or anus – follow [CDC guidance](#) and screen men at all parts of the body where exposure may occur.

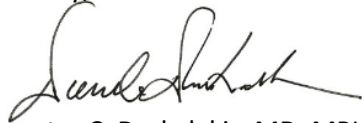
**Discuss PrEP and the sexual health toolkit:** Inform Latino MSM about the entire sexual health toolkit, including regular HIV and STI testing, condoms, and [PrEP and emergency PEP](#) to prevent HIV. Correct, consistent condom use remains an effective way to prevent HIV and other STIs. However, not all men regularly use condoms or can convince their partners to use them. For HIV prevention, PrEP is a particularly effective option.

Despite PrEP's effectiveness, Latino men in New York City are [far less likely](#) to use PrEP than White men. Increase access to PrEP for Latino MSM by providing supportive care and making patients aware of programs that can [help pay for PrEP](#), especially for individuals who may be uninsured or undocumented. Discuss PrEP with patients, particularly men diagnosed with [primary or secondary syphilis or a rectal STI](#), as men diagnosed with these infections have [a high likelihood](#) of HIV infection within the next year. Additionally, men who express interest in PrEP should not be discouraged from starting PrEP, even if they report condom use or being in a monogamous relationship.

**Educate patients on HIV treatment and undetectable HIV:** Current antiretroviral therapies for HIV are highly effective, safe and well-tolerated. Provide immediate treatment to all people with HIV, even on the day of diagnosis, to halt damage to the patient's immune system and to prevent transmission to others. Regardless of HIV status, inform Latino MSM that recent clinical studies show that people with HIV who are on treatment and maintain an undetectable viral load [do not transmit HIV through sex](#). The message that "Undetectable equals Untransmittable," or "U = U," reduces HIV-related stigma, encourages HIV testing and treatment, and helps individuals and couples pursue effective strategies to prevent HIV. Treatment is available for all people with HIV through the [New York State HIV Uninsured Care Programs](#).

With your help, this new wave of the "¡Listos!" campaign will encourage Latino men to seek care, and engage in open and honest conversations about sexual health with their medical providers. We thank you for your commitment to supporting healthy sexuality for all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,



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