Summary: The NYC Health Department urges medical providers to expand the offer of PrEP to HIV-negative women, considering both prescribing guidelines and local epidemiology. We ask you to:

1. Offer PrEP to women diagnosed with gonorrhea or early syphilis – biomarkers of HIV risk.
2. Screen women for other HIV risk and offer PrEP accordingly – including to women who have sex for money, a history of intimate partner violence, or an HIV-positive partner with a detectable or unknown viral load.
3. Offer PrEP to Black and Latina women who live in areas of high HIV incidence – such as the Bronx, Brooklyn, upper Manhattan, southeastern Queens or the North Shore of Staten Island.
4. When offering PrEP, discuss condom use and emergency PEP as HIV prevention options, and reproductive health needs as appropriate.

July 31, 2017

Dear Colleague,

Each year in NYC, over 400 women are diagnosed with HIV, the vast majority Black or Latina. PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) is a powerful tool to prevent HIV infection. While PrEP use has steadily increased among men who have sex with men, few women are aware of PrEP and far fewer are taking this daily prevention pill. Identifying women at risk of exposure to HIV, and encouraging them to consider PrEP, has the potential to greatly reduce the burden of HIV among women, an underserved population.

New York State PrEP guidelines indicate that women diagnosed with anogenital sexually transmitted infection (STIs) are prime candidates for PrEP. Diagnosis of gonorrhea and syphilis (in its primary, secondary or early latent stages) are a particular concern; among HIV-negative women in NYC, these STIs are predominantly diagnosed in women who live in neighborhoods with high rates of HIV diagnosis (many of which are also characterized by high HIV prevalence and high poverty).

Obstetricians, gynecologists and other providers can assess for other indications for PrEP by taking a comprehensive sexual history. New York State guidelines recommend the consideration of PrEP for HIV-negative women who:

- Are in a sexual relationship with a partner living with HIV (whose viral load is unknown or not consistently suppressed)
- Have sex for money, drugs or housing
- Have been prescribed PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis) and have continued risk of HIV exposure
- Use stimulant drugs that increase the risk of HIV exposure
- Inject drugs and share injection equipment
- Are transgender women whose sexual practices may expose them to HIV

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Additionally, the CDC identifies women as at increased risk for HIV infection if they have a high number of sexual partners, a male partner who also has sex with men, or have experienced intimate partner violence.

Offer PrEP to all women with evidence of HIV risk, bearing in mind local epidemiology. In NYC, 90% of women newly diagnosed with HIV are Black or Latina and over half are 40 years of age or older. Providers should have a low threshold for offering PrEP to sexually active Black and Latina women, including women over 40, particularly if they reside in areas of high HIV diagnosis among women such as the Bronx, Brooklyn, upper Manhattan, southeastern Queens or the North Shore of Staten Island.

Counseling around PrEP is an opportunity to have frank conversation about a patient’s HIV and STI risk – and the possibility of future exposure. Women who request PrEP but are reluctant to discuss their individual risk should also be considered for initiation, as fear of judgment may create barriers to disclosure. During PrEP-related counseling, discuss HIV prevention options including condom use, emergency PEP and reproductive health care, as appropriate. Take into consideration that not all women use condoms, or are able to insist that their partners use them consistently, and some may benefit from a prevention method that they control, like PrEP. Advise patients starting PrEP that condoms protect against STIs and unintended pregnancy, and provide additional protection against HIV. For women on PrEP, support retention and provide follow-up care per New York State guidelines.

Ensure that women patients at risk of HIV are aware that PrEP and PEP are highly effective prevention options, and are available even to the uninsured and underinsured. The NYC Health Department PrEP and PEP Action Kit offers resources for both providers and patients. Increasing the offer of PrEP to women will help reduce gender, racial and ethnic inequities in PrEP use and, in turn, HIV infection.

Sincerely,

Demetre C. Daskalakis, MD, MPH
Deputy Commissioner, Division of Disease Control

George L. Askew, MD
Deputy Commissioner, Division of Family and Child Health

Oxiris Barbot, MD
First Deputy Commissioner of Health