April 15, 2020

Maintain HIV and STI Services and Minimize In-Person Care During the COVID-19 Outbreak

Dear Colleague:

During the COVID-19 outbreak, many hospitals and clinics need to emphasize the care of patients who are severely ill with COVID-19 or other conditions. We ask providers of sexual health care to take steps to prevent COVID-19 transmission while maintaining key HIV and STI services:

1. **Minimize clinical encounters.**
   - In clinical spaces, patients can be exposed to the 2019 coronavirus or expose others.

2. **Provide services by telephone or video conference when possible.**
   - For New York State Medicaid, services covered under a comprehensive insurance policy or contract must be covered when delivered via telemedicine.

3. **Submit prescriptions electronically and encourage use of mail-order pharmacies or pharmacies that offer home delivery.**
   - Discourage patients from stockpiling drugs to avoid exacerbating shortages.
   - New York State has approved 90-day prescriptions for patients in Medicaid, Medicare, and the Uninsured Care Programs/ADAP.

4. **Share guidance with patients on enjoying safer sex during the outbreak.**
   - People should avoid close contact – including sex – with anyone outside their household or anyone who feels unwell.

**GUIDANCE ON SPECIFIC CLINICAL SERVICES**

**HIV testing:** Encourage patients to delay their regular visit for HIV testing until COVID-19 transmission has begun to subside.
- Consumers can purchase a [home test kit](#) for delivery or pick one up at a local pharmacy.

**HIV treatment:** Support patients to achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load to prevent illness related to both HIV and COVID-19. See interim [U.S. guidance](#) on COVID-19 and persons with HIV.
- Inform people with HIV that there is no evidence that they are at greater risk of severe COVID-19 illness unless they are immunocompromised (e.g., have a low CD4 count).
- Use telephone or video conferences to ensure continuity of care for HIV primary care, case management, and mental health and substance use services.
- Offer immediate treatment to patients with a newly reactive HIV test result or who are previously diagnosed and treatment-naïve, following NYC and New York State guidance.
- Delay elective regimen changes until proper monitoring and follow-up can be ensured.
- Share any barriers to providing services with insurers or government funders; many funders are relaxing some contractual obligations during the outbreak.
HIV Emergency PEP: Patients in need of HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) should not go to an emergency room, which are now reserved for people with severe illness.

- Inform patients that they can initiate PEP without a clinic visit by calling the 24/7 PEP hotline:
  - In NYC, call: (844) 3-PEPNYC (844-373-7692).
  - In New York State, outside of NYC, call: (844) PEP4NOW (844-737-4669)

HIV PrEP: As New Yorkers are required to stay home, fewer will need to initiate pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent HIV. Consider home self-testing for people who need to start PrEP.

- Use telephone or video conference to discuss pausing PrEP or switching to PrEP on demand.
  - Cisgender men who have sex with men can conserve their supply of medicines by taking PrEP on demand, before and after sex, following NYC and New York State guidance.
- Delay switching PrEP regimens or scheduled in-person monitoring, with possible exceptions for patients with impaired renal function.
- In place of scheduled testing, ask patients about symptoms of incident HIV and STIs.

Other sexually transmitted infections: Minimize the need for in-person clinic visits.

- Manage patients by telephone or video conference using reported symptoms or exposure. See WHO guidance on syndromic management of STIs (section 3, chapter 8, page 97).
- Treat STIs presumptively, prescribing oral medicines whenever possible.
- Treat people who are or may become pregnant and who were infected or sexually exposed to syphilis with injectable benzathine penicillin G to prevent fetal infection.
- Health care providers may provide expedited partner therapy for gonorrhea, chlamydia, and trichomonas, as New York State law now allows, using a shared clinical decision-making process with their patients.

SERVICES AT SEXUAL HEALTH CLINICS

NYC: The Chelsea Sexual Health Clinic remains open Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

- The Chelsea Sexual Health Clinic is currently providing walk-in patients with:
  - Emergency contraception
  - Emergency PEP to prevent HIV
  - Immediate initiation of HIV treatment for treatment-naïve individuals
- The NYC Health Department provides diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted disease by telephone (347-396-7959, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.). Staff will refer patients who require in-person evaluation or injectable treatment to the Chelsea Sexual Health Clinic. The Health Department is also developing capacity to provide consultation to providers on managing STI.

New York State outside of NYC: Contact the local health department for current sexual health services availability.

NEW YORK STATE RESOURCES
COVID-19: Information for Healthcare Providers
Medicaid: For frequently updated guidance, see COVID-19 Medicaid Guidance and Updates. AIDS Institute Provider Directory: Services for HIV, hepatitis C, sexual health, drug use, etc.
Uninsured Care Programs/ADAP: For questions, call the hotline at 800-542-2437 or 844-682-4058.

Sincerely,

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