

## Maintaining HIV and STI Services During COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, providers of sexual health care can maintain key HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) services by taking the following steps to prevent COVID-19 transmission:

- Minimize non-urgent clinical encounters.
- Provide services by telephone or video conference when possible.
- Encourage the use of mail-order pharmacies or pharmacies that offer home delivery.
  - New York State (NYS) has approved 90-day prescriptions for patients in Medicaid, Medicare, [Uninsured Care Programs and the AIDS Drug Assistance Program \(ADAP\)](#).
- Remind patients to avoid close contact (including sex) with anyone outside their household.
  - Share guidance with patients on [enjoying safer sex](#) during the pandemic.
- Follow NYC's updated guidance on COVID-19 for [providers](#) and [the general public](#).

### Guidance on Specific Clinical Services

**HIV testing:** Patients who do not have symptoms or other indications of incident HIV may decide to get tested less frequently in a clinical setting during COVID-19.

- Clinics can sign up with the NYC Home Test Giveaway to have free HIV self-test kits shipped to their patients. For more information, email [chtgiveaway@health.nyc.gov](mailto:chtgiveaway@health.nyc.gov).
- Consumers can directly order a free home test kit from [agencies listed here \(PDF\)](#).

**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 people with HIV.

- Inform people with HIV that there is no evidence that they are at greater risk of severe COVID-19 unless they are immunocompromised (such as having 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 newly reactive HIV test results or who are previously diagnosed and treatment-naïve, following [NYC](#) and [NYS](#) guidance.
- Share any barriers to providing services with insurers or government funders. Many funders are relaxing certain contractual obligations during the pandemic.

**HIV Emergency PEP:** Inform patients that they can initiate HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) without a visit to an emergency room or clinic by calling the **NYC PEP hotline** at **844-3-PEPNYC** (844-373-7692), available 24/7.

- Qualified patients will receive an electronic prescription for a full 28 days of PEP medicines and a home self-test kit for baseline HIV testing.

**HIV PrEP:** As New Yorkers are encouraged to stay home as much as possible, fewer may need to initiate pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent HIV.

- Use telephone or video conference to discuss pausing PrEP or, for cisgender men who have sex with men, switching to [PrEP on demand](#).

- Cisgender men who have sex with men taking tenofovir disoproxil fumarate-emtricitabine (TDF/FTC) as PrEP can conserve their supply of medicines by taking PrEP on demand, before and after sex, following [NYC](#) and [NYS](#) guidance.
- Delay switching PrEP regimens or scheduled in-person monitoring, with possible exceptions for patients with impaired renal function.
- Consider offering a [free home HIV self-test kit](#) to patients who are starting PrEP.
- In place of scheduled follow-up testing, ask patients about symptoms of incident HIV and STIs.

**STI Screening:** As clinics restore in-person care, they may consider resuming routine screening for STIs.

- Prioritize routine STI screening for patients at highest risk and from populations with the highest disease burden, including young women and men who have sex with men.

**STI Treatment:** To minimize in-person clinic visits, manage patients by telephone or video conference using reported symptoms or exposure.

- Refer to the [NYC guidance](#) on syndromic management of STIs.
- 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 [NYS law](#) now allows, using a shared clinical decision-making process with their patients.

**Services at NYC Sexual Health Clinics:** Patients can consult with a health care provider on STIs and HIV by calling the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline at **347-396-7959**.

Clinics in Chelsea, Fort Greene and Jamaica provide the following services to walk-in patients:

- Emergency contraception
- Long-acting reversible contraception (by appointment only)
- Evaluation for signs of HIV or other STIs
- Routine STI and HIV screening (for people age 21 or younger)
- PEP to prevent HIV
- Initiation of HIV treatment

Visit our website for updated information on clinic [locations, hours and services](#).

### **NYS Resources**

- **Medicaid:** COVID-19 [Guidance for Medicaid Providers](#) and [DOH Medicaid Updates](#).
- **[AIDS Institute Provider Directory](#):** Services for HIV, hepatitis C, sexual health and drug use.
- **Uninsured Care Programs and ADAP:** Call the hotline at **800-542-2437**.

**The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves. 8.4.20**