

Routine HIV Testing in Health Care Settings

Texas Department of State Health Services HIV/STD Program

Routine HIV Testing

The Big Picture.

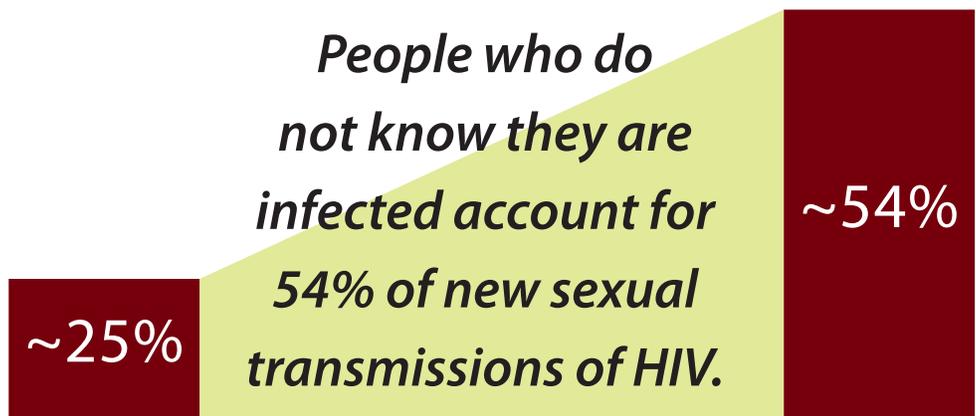
Every 9½ minutes, someone in the U.S. is infected with HIV. At least one in five people with HIV in the U.S. do not know they are infected. Most of those unaware of their infection visit the doctor for routine care but are not tested for HIV. Typically, health care providers test only patients who report a behavior that would increase their risk for getting HIV. The social stigma these behaviors can carry often lead patients not to tell the doctor about them.

For each patient not tested, another opportunity to detect, treat and reduce the transmission of HIV is lost. The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommend routine HIV testing when patients receive healthcare.

Why routine HIV testing?

Routine HIV testing is the first line of defense against HIV and AIDS. People who know they are infected with HIV can and do make choices to protect themselves and others. Routine testing can also help eliminate the stigma and fear associated with risk-based HIV testing. Routine testing means earlier diagnosis and treatment.

Late diagnosis of HIV is associated with poor health outcomes including early death. Yet, HIV/AIDS medications are highly effective when started early in the course of HIV infection, and are available at low cost to low income persons. Early treatment suppresses HIV and reduces the chance for further spreading HIV. Medical costs are also higher for people diagnosed with HIV after they are already sick.



Research shows that people who know they are HIV-positive are much more likely to reduce or eliminate behaviors that could infect others. People who do not know they are infected are more than three times more likely to infect others than those who know their HIV status. In theory, new sexual HIV infections could be reduced by more than 30 percent per year if all infected people knew their HIV status and reduce behaviors that can infect others.

What are the CDC recommendations for routine HIV testing?

The CDC recommends that HIV testing be a part of routine clinical care for all people between 13 and 64. Testing should be repeated at least annually for those with known risk. Health care providers should inform patients of the HIV test in the same way they inform patients of all testing, and allow them to decline if they choose. In Texas, the patient's general medical consent form is considered consent to HIV testing. Texas law does **not** require pre-test counseling, although the CDC recommends information about the test and HIV be provided.

State law requires that a pregnant woman be tested for HIV unless she objects. These tests must take place during her first prenatal visit, during the third trimester and upon admission for delivery if no record of the third trimester HIV test is available.

Health care providers may deliver negative HIV test results to the patient without direct personal contact. However, they must provide HIV positive test results confidentially and through face-to-face contact. The local public health authority will contact all positive HIV tests for public health follow-up, counseling and referral to services.

Routine testing is cost effective.

Routine HIV testing in health care settings is as cost effective as other routine screening for conditions and diseases such as breast or colon cancer, hypertension, and high cholesterol. Early diagnosis and treatment are much more cost effective than when HIV is diagnosed late in the course of the disease.

Screening tests for HIV are cost effective, inexpensive and highly accurate, but health insurance coverage is highly variable. HIV should be treated like any other laboratory test. Patients will need to know up front if they will have to pay for the test.

Routine testing is a powerful public health tool.

People who know they are infected with HIV make choices to protect themselves and others. Routine HIV testing can increase the number of people who know their HIV status. Routine testing in all health care settings reduces disease transmission, improves health outcomes, is cost effective and eliminates the stigma often associated with HIV testing. Routine HIV testing is good for public health.

For source information, please call (512) 533-3000 or send an e-mail to hivstd@dshs.state.tx.us.

ROUTINE HIV TESTING FACTS TO CONSIDER:

People who do not know they have HIV cause more than half of the 4,200 new HIV infections in Texas each year.

1 out of 3 HIV-infected Texans are diagnosed with AIDS within one year of being diagnosed with HIV (late diagnosis).

65% of Hispanics in Texas get a late HIV diagnosis, compared to 54% of Whites and 46% of Blacks.

Hospitals, community clinics and doctors' offices account for more than half of all HIV diagnoses.

Most people who test positive for HIV had previous health care visits but were not tested for HIV.

More than 72,000 Texans are known to be living with HIV.



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