
URGENT COMMUNICABLE DISEASE MEDICAL ADVISORY

To: Primary Care Physicians, Family Practice Nurses, Nurse Practitioners,
Emergency Rooms, Internal Medicine

From: Gaynor Watson-Creed, Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Health

Date: July 13, 2018

Dear colleagues:

Situation/Topic

- NSHA Public Health has noted a significant increase in reports of newly diagnosed HIV in the province since the start of 2018. In collaboration with the Department of Health and Wellness, NSHA Public Health is closely monitoring the situation and has enhanced follow up and case finding efforts. Men who have sex with men and/or people who inject drugs are the most commonly reported risk factors.

Request/Guidance

- A high index of suspicion in the person with a nonspecific febrile illness and a history of high-risk behavior(s) is key to making the diagnosis of acute HIV. Symptoms and signs of acute HIV are self-limited and can be mild – 80–90% of HIV-infected people develop a febrile illness within 4 to 8 weeks after exposure to the virus.
- Regular serologic screening of asymptomatic individuals at risk of HIV is important to improve detection of cases and decrease further transmission. For risk factor information and screening recommendations see the [Canadian Guidelines for Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)
- Sexual transmission (infectiousness and susceptibility) of HIV is enhanced by the presence of other STIs including ulcerative genital infections (e.g., syphilis,

genital herpes) and non-ulcerative genital infections (e.g., chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomoniasis). Individuals with risk factors for HIV should be tested for other STIs.

- HIV tests are performed by serology at regional laboratories in Nova Scotia. All positive HIV screening tests are sent to the QEII Health Sciences Centre virology laboratory for confirmatory testing.
- Negative tests may occur during the “window period” for recent infections and retesting may be required 3 months after last potential exposure to allow for detection of an antibody response.

Further Information

- HIV is only one of the many sexually-transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) Nova Scotians are at risk of obtaining.
- Further information about HIV and other STBBIs can be found in the Canadian Guidelines for Sexually Transmitted Infections available at <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/sexual-health-sexually-transmitted-infections/canadian-guidelines.html>
- HIV is a reportable disease to the Medical Officer of Health in Nova Scotia. If you have questions or need further information please contact your local public health office.