

# **HIV Counseling, Testing, and Referral Standards and Guidelines**

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## **HIV Counseling**

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# HIV COUNSELING AND TESTING - OVERVIEW

## Historical Perspective

Publicly funded HIV antibody counseling and testing services were initiated in March 1985 to provide an alternative to the donation of blood as a means for high-risk persons to determine their HIV status. At that time, little was known about the prevalence and natural history of HIV infection. Counseling was considered an essential adjunct to HIV testing. The counseling addressed the accuracy and consequences of the test and was designed to help persons interpret the meaning of positive or negative antibody results. HIV counseling was based on the recognition that learning HIV status may be difficult for some clients.

In 1987, with increased understanding about the scope and severity of the HIV epidemic and the predictive value of a positive test, HIV counseling and testing were expanded. Persons seeking care for sexually transmitted infections, family planning, childbirth, or substance abuse were counseled and tested in an attempt to reduce their risk for HIV transmission. “The primary public health purposes of counseling and testing are to help uninfected individuals initiate and sustain behavioral changes that reduce their risk of becoming infected and to assist infected individuals in avoiding infecting others.” (1)

Since that time, public awareness about HIV infection has increased, and the reliability and predictive value of the HIV test have been proven. Investigations have demonstrated the benefit of early antiviral and prophylactic treatment for HIV infected persons. These HIV counseling standards and guidelines are the result of increased knowledge about HIV prevention and experience with HIV counseling. Counseling is a direct, personalized, and client-centered intervention designed to help initiate behavior change to avoid infection or, if already infected, to prevent transmission to others, and to obtain referral to additional medical care, preventive, psychosocial and other needed services in order to remain healthy.

## Goals of HIV Counseling, Testing, and Referral Services

The current goals of HIV counseling are as follows:

- provide a convenient opportunity for persons to learn their current serostatus;
- allow such persons to receive prevention counseling to help initiate behavior change to prevent the transmission or acquisition of HIV;

- help persons obtain referrals to receive additional medical-care, preventive, psychosocial, and other needed services;
- provide prevention services and referrals for sex and needle sharing partners of HIV-infected persons.

## Objectives of HIV Counseling, Testing, and Referral Services

1. Identify persons who are unaware, uninformed, misinformed, or in denial of their risk for HIV infection and facilitate an accurate self-perception of risk.
2. Prepare clients for and provide them with knowledge of their HIV infection status.
3. Negotiate a relevant risk reduction plan and obtain a commitment from clients to reduce their HIV risk.
4. Refer clients to resources that will provide psychosocial support and facilitate desired behavior change.
5. Provide referral to appropriate drug treatment services for clients whose substance abuse problems enhance their HIV risk.
6. Provide information on the increased risk of HIV transmission associated with other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and give referrals for STD examination and treatment.
7. Provide family planning information and referrals for women of child bearing age who are infected or at high risk for HIV.
8. Provide referrals to HIV positive and high risk HIV negative persons for necessary medical, preventive, and psychosocial services.
9. Communicate to the client the responsibility for appropriate disclosure including the notification of sex and needle-sharing partners.

## Necessary Elements of HIV Counseling, Testing, and Referral Services

- **Maintenance of Confidentiality**  
Strict protection of client confidentiality must be maintained for all persons offered and receiving HIV counseling services.
- **Risk Assessment**  
Risk assessment is the portion of a client-centered discussion that encourages the client to identify, understand, and acknowledge his or her personal risk for acquiring HIV.
- **Prevention Counseling**  
Counseling provides a critical opportunity to assist the client in identifying his or her risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV. It also provides an opportunity to negotiate and

reinforce a plan to reduce or eliminate behavioral risk. Counseling prior to HIV testing (pretest) should prepare the client for receiving, understanding, and managing his or her test result.

- **Providing Test Results**

Providing HIV antibody test results to a client involves interpretation that is based upon the test result and the client's specific risk for HIV infection. Knowledge of HIV status is important information that a client can use to plan behavior change. Skillful, client-centered counseling is required to reassess behavioral risks which may influence the interpretation of test results. The client will most often focus on the actual result itself rather than behavioral and prevention messages.

- **Provision of Referrals**

Clients may require referral for physical and psychological evaluations, appropriate therapies (i.e., drug treatment), and support services to enhance or sustain risk reduction behaviors. Each program should maintain complete knowledge of referral resources, including the availability, accessibility, and eligibility criteria for services.

## DEFINITIONS

These standards and guidelines on HIV counseling were established after consultation between outside experts and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) staff. The document is divided into two sections. The first section addresses program level guidance in establishing policies and procedures which are critical to the development and maintenance of an HIV prevention counseling program. The second section describes guidance for counselors and other providers in the approach to and delivery of HIV prevention counseling services. This document will provide two levels of guidance (2):

- **Standards** in this document are intended to be consistently applied to the delivery of HIV counseling services. They *must* be followed in virtually all cases.
- **Guidelines** are intended to be more flexible. They *should* be followed in *most* cases. However, they recognize that, depending on the client, setting and other factors, guidelines can and should be tailored to fit individual needs.

These standards and guidelines are intended for persons who provide counseling in connection with HIV testing (3) and encompass the following concepts and terminology:

- **Triage assessment** is the process that determines whether someone should be referred to counseling. Triage assessment facilitates access to prevention counseling services for those persons at increased risk for HIV.

- **Risk assessment** is the process of assisting the client to identify behaviors that place him or her at risk for HIV. The risk assessment should include: reason for visit and other relevant concerns; personal circumstances; the client's resources and support systems; behavioral and other sources of risk; demographic and epidemiologic factors that influence risk; client's awareness of risk, readiness to change behavior, and receptiveness to available services and referrals. An integral component of HIV prevention, risk assessment is not intended solely as a screening tool for client eligibility for HIV testing. The discussion between the client and counselor should result in a **negotiated risk reduction plan**. The plan must be a realistic, attainable strategy that is developed with the client to achieve behavior changes to reduce the risk for acquiring or transmitting HIV.

- **Client-centered counseling** refers to counseling conducted in an interactive manner responsive to individual client needs. This counseling avoids a preconceived set of points to be made by the counselor and encourages the client to do most of the talking. The focus is on developing prevention goals and strategies with the client rather than simply providing information. An understanding of the unique circumstances of the client is required—behaviors, sexual identity, race/ethnicity, culture, knowledge, and social and economic status.

- **Appropriate disclosure** involves all of the circumstances in which others should be informed of the client's HIV infection status. This determination requires consideration of local and state laws, client confidentiality, and the need to inform others. Disclosure to health care providers and current and subsequent sex and/or drug partners is essential. The client may need guidance and assistance on the methods of informing persons who need to know.

## REFERENCES

- (1) CDC. Public Health Service Guidelines for Counseling and Antibody Testing to Prevent HIV Infection and AIDS. *MMWR* 1987;36:509-515.
- (2) Eddy, DM. Designing a Practice Policy, Standards, Guidelines, and Options. *JAMA*. 1990;263:3077-3084.
- (3) CDC. Public Health Service Guidelines for Counseling and Antibody Testing to Prevent HIV Infection and AIDS. *MMWR* 1987;36:509-515.

# HIV COUNSELING, TESTING, AND REFERRAL

## Program Standards and Guidelines

### Client Eligibility Criteria

Public health agencies that receive federal funds from the National Center for Prevention Services (NCPS) are required to routinely offer, on a voluntary basis with informed consent, HIV prevention counseling and HIV laboratory testing services to persons who are potentially HIV infected, their partners and others who have high risk behaviors (1). Grantees are encouraged to offer services to clients at designated counseling and testing sites, sexually transmitted disease (STD) clinics, drug treatment centers, tuberculosis clinics, criminal justice and correctional systems, women's health clinics, youth and adolescent programs, and other sites which serve persons with risk behaviors for acquiring HIV. To use resources as efficiently as possible, grantees are encouraged to integrate HIV counseling and testing into ongoing operations, especially in STD and substance abuse treatment clinics. HIV Prevention Community Planning provides a forum for priority setting, accomplished through a participatory process, which may guide the targeting of HIV counseling services.

Unless it is prohibited by state law or regulation, clients should be offered reasonable opportunities to receive HIV-antibody counseling and testing services anonymously. The availability of anonymous services may encourage some persons at risk to seek services who would otherwise be reluctant to do so. Grantees who elect to charge for services are strongly encouraged to use a sliding scale, and to provide services regardless of ability to pay. The fact that services will not be denied because of the client's inability to pay should be clearly communicated by the facility by posting signs or providing written materials. Program staff who register clients or collect fees should be familiar with this policy. When a client is identified to be at risk for HIV infection, the health care facility is responsible for providing services or ensuring effective referral for services.

Counseling programs should develop a triage assessment procedure to identify persons at risk for HIV infection. This procedure should consider local circumstances that influence the risk of HIV infection for persons who might not be perceived as being at risk. Health care providers should take advantage of every encounter with a client to reinforce HIV prevention messages (2).

#### *Standards*

HIV prevention program managers must accomplish the following:

- Establish systems to ensure that strict confidentiality is maintained for all persons who are assessed for HIV counseling and testing services;

- Seek to ensure that all persons who seek HIV testing are offered counseling relevant to their needs;
- Seek to ensure that persons who are determined to be at risk for HIV infection as a result of sexual or drug using behaviors are routinely counseled;
- Establish that no facility that receives federal funds for HIV counseling and testing services may deny a client services because of that client's inability to pay (3).

### *SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS*

- Clients who request repeat testing should be managed as indicated in the "**Counseling and Repeat Testing Section.**"

### REFERENCES

- (1) CDC. 1992 HIV Prevention Program Guidance.
- (2) CDC. Technical Guidance on HIV Counseling, January 1993.
- (3) CDC. 1992 HIV Prevention Program Guidance.

### Risk Assessment Development

Program managers, from sites that provide HIV counseling services, should review available data to identify site-specific HIV prevention needs. This review and evaluation should include AIDS case surveillance data, HIV seroprevalence data, STD morbidity, prevention counseling data, and demographic and risk behavior profiles of the population and the catchment community served by each site. Based on analysis of these data, the program should develop policies for each site that address the appropriate provision of primary and secondary HIV prevention services including triage assessment, and targeted or universal risk assessment procedures. For example, if the voluntary HIV testing seropositivity at a site is higher than the blinded seroprevalence, this site may be successfully targeting prevention efforts. However, if the voluntary HIV testing seropositivity is lower than the blinded seroprevalence, this site may not be appropriately targeting assessments, outreach efforts, prevention counseling, and/or provision of voluntary testing services. This information should be used to plan activities and services, redirect efforts and resources to meet current needs, use resources more efficiently, and identify unmet service needs.

Each site that offers HIV testing must provide prevention counseling tailored to individual client needs and should develop an effective method to involve clients in identifying their risk behaviors. This approach should also address local and specific circumstances which might influence the client's perception of risk. Where available, sites should use triage assessment as one of the first efforts to direct persons at risk of HIV infection into prevention counseling. The clinic environment should support the risk assessment process, by involving clients

in identifying their risk behaviors. Strategies to achieve this include group discussions, audiovisual materials, pamphlets, and/or posters. Community based organizations are excellent collaborators in the development and provision of client support services. Educating clients through multiple methods increases the chance that clients will recognize behaviors which place them at risk.

#### *Standards*

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HIV prevention program managers must make certain that the following are achieved:

- Provision of training and quality assurance to ensure identification of risk behaviors of all clients counseled or tested for HIV;
- Establishment of site-specific demographic and risk profiles, based on analysis of HIV test data;
- Ongoing collection and review of available site-specific data, including AIDS case surveillance data, HIV seroprevalence data, STD morbidity, prevention counseling data, demographic, and risk behavior profiles for targeting of resources and quality assurance of service delivery;
- Determination of appropriate site-specific strategies for risk assessment of clients, based on demographic and risk profiles;
- Procedures to maximize targeting of clients for prevention counseling based on risk profiles.

#### *Guidelines*

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HIV prevention program managers should do the following:

- Ongoing review and analysis of relevant seroprevalence data, including site specific blinded seroprevalence if available; and
- Analyze, by site, the extent of HIV prevention counseling coverage (number of clients seen, blinded seroprevalence, and number of HIV infected persons identified through prevention counseling).

### **Referral Service Development**

A thorough client assessment often indicates a need for services that cannot be provided by the counselor (e.g. drug treatment, peer support groups, etc.). To ensure that clients receive appropriate care, the program must establish a procedure for referring persons to sites that provide services in a timely, efficient, and professional manner. A collaborative relationship should have already been established with the appropriate representative of the referral site.

#### *Standards*

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HIV prevention program managers must develop a process for routine referral which include the following:

- A written referral process for identifying, evaluating, and updating referral sources in the site's operations manual;

- A mechanism to provide clients with immediate access to emergency psychological or medical service;
- Appropriate referral resources for:
  - Any client at-risk for HIV infection who may be in need of support to maintain safer behaviors,
  - HIV negative clients who continue to test but are without risk,
  - HIV negative clients who continue to engage in risk behavior,
  - HIV positive clients who continue to engage in risk behavior,
  - HIV positive or high risk HIV negative clients who need STD diagnosis and/or treatment, and
  - HIV positive persons who need a medical assessment.
- Written standards for the follow-up of confidentially tested HIV positive clients who do not return for results and counseling.

#### *Guidelines*

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HIV prevention program managers should develop a process for routine referral which would accomplish the following:

- Maintains a current list of community and institutional referral resources such as infectious disease specialists and clinics, free clinics, social service agencies, emergency medical services, hospitals, prenatal care clinics, family planning clinics, mental health centers, AIDS service organizations, HIV/AIDS community-based organizations (CBOs), substance abuse treatment facilities, and religious institutions;
- Establishes a liaison at each of these resources; and
- Provides periodic inservices from referral agencies.

### **Quality Assurance**

The objective of quality assurance is to ensure that appropriate, competent, and sensitive methods are used for risk assessments, counseling, and referral of clients. Management staff, contractors, or collaborative agency staff should be trained and able to perform routine objective quality assurance site visits. A minimal level of performance should be determined and agreed upon by the funding agency and the service provider. Less than minimal performance must be remedied, or the site should suspend counseling and testing activities until an acceptable minimal standard of performance can be assured. Counseling programs should develop written quality assurance policies and procedures consistent with these standards and guidelines; these documents should be available to all staff. Client feedback should be routinely used as a factor in assessing the quality assurance of services provided.

#### *Standards*

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##### **I. Facility**

- The site must be geographically accessible to the population it serves.

- The site must operate during appropriate hours and minimize any delay in providing services.
- Counseling rooms must be private to ensure confidentiality of the counseling session.

## II. Staff

- Management staff must ensure that necessary resources and systems are available to ensure acceptable job performance.
- The program director must ensure adequate on-site supervision for staff.
- Counselors must meet locally established qualification standards.
- Counselors and other relevant staff must be provided updates at least annually on the scientific/public health aspects of HIV.

## III. Educational and Risk Reduction Materials

- Culturally competent, linguistically specific, and developmentally appropriate written HIV information must be available to clients. The National HIV Clearing house is a useful resource to obtain and review a range of HIV education and risk reduction materials.

## IV. Records/Forms

- Client records (confidential and anonymous) must contain a copy of the informed consent document, laboratory slip with test results, documentation of prevention counseling, result notification, and formulation of risk-reduction plans.
- Records with patient identifiers must be secured.
- All personal identifying information in connection with the delivery of services provided to any person must not be disclosed unless required by law or unless the person provides written, voluntary informed consent.
- Routine audits of risk assessment questionnaires, counseling and interview forms, and client risk reduction plans must be conducted.

*Guidelines* \_\_\_\_\_

### I. Facility

- The physical facility should display a level of professionalism and client orientation relevant to the population served.

### II. Staff

- A written job description should be provided for all counselors.
- Performance tasks and standards should be established and reviewed with each counselor.
- All counselor and supervisory staff should be familiar with all services connected with the counseling program.

- New counselors should be observed (with client consent) daily until proficiency is assured and periodically thereafter to ensure that proficiency is maintained.
- The supervisor should routinely provide constructive feedback to the counselor based on observations.
- Case presentations should be conducted routinely, using techniques such as team problem solving sessions with medical, supervisory, and counseling staffs.
- Each counselor and supervisor should be provided additional information through training and/or inservices about HIV, STD, TB, immunization, family planning, substance abuse, and early interventions such as antiviral treatments, etc.

## III. Educational and Risk Reduction Materials

- Condoms should be available to the client—directly from providers and easily accessible without the client having to ask.
- Current written materials should be prominently displayed in public areas and made available to clients.
- Current written and audiovisual materials should be culturally and linguistically appropriate for the client population. Materials should be sensitive to the reading levels, gender, and ethnicity of the client population.

## Publicly Funded Programs – Data Collection and Analysis

Accurate and consistent data collection of HIV prevention counseling, test results, notification of results, referrals, and partner notification activities are critical to the implementation, maintenance, and evaluation of a quality HIV prevention program. Data collection and quality assurance of referrals and partner notification are addressed in the respective guidelines. Analysis of HIV counseling and testing data in combination with seroprevalence and local demographic and STD morbidity data are essential components of prevention program operations. These data should help:

- Identify barriers and gaps in service delivery,
- Plan, refine and target program intervention strategies,
- Analyze resource allocation,
- Provide site specific feedback to clinic staff, and
- Provide specific feedback to counselors.

*Standards* \_\_\_\_\_

Publicly funded programs must:

- Utilize a standard data collection tool throughout the project area;
- Collect minimum required variables:
  - Unique record/client identifier;
  - Unique site identifier;
  - Prevention counselor identifier;
  - Date of prevention session;

- Client demographics (age, sex, race/ethnicity, state, county, and zip code),
- Client risk behavior (identified through client self-assessment and/or counselor discussion with client during prevention counseling);
- Final laboratory result/report; and
- Date of notification of results and prevention counseling.
- Adhere to the NCPS site numbering system criteria:
  - Site number is determined by where the client is tested;
  - Each clinic within a facility has a unique site number;
  - Satellite clinics require a unique site number;
  - Site numbers are not duplicated across counties, districts, or parishes;
  - Site location, not counselor identification number, determines the site number; and
  - Counselor/DIS field services and outreach teams require a unique group site number for field work.
- Conduct routine and systematic review of data for errors and inconsistencies and establish formal mechanisms for corrections.
- Report client record data (with client identifiers removed) to NCPS on a quarterly basis.
- Use the following program indicators to assess HIV testing at individual sites:
  - Number of clinic visits,
  - Number of clients eligible for prevention counseling,
  - Number of clients who received prevention counseling,

- Number of clients tested for HIV,
- Number of clients testing positive,
- Number of positive clients notified of results and provided prevention counseling,
- Number of clients testing negative,
- Number of negative clients notified of results and provided prevention counseling, and
- Other relevant program indicators identified through ongoing quality assurance and data analysis.

**Note 1: The first three indicators provide important denominator data for sites that provide a range of health care services.**

**Note 2: Ongoing consultations are planned and may alter data collection and data analyses standards.**

*Guidelines* \_\_\_\_\_

Publicly funded programs should:

- Review site-specific data analysis with appropriate staff at least quarterly.
- Conduct counselor-specific data analysis and provide feedback to the counselor at least twice a year.
- Conduct personnel resource analysis to establish minimum workload guidelines.
- Establish a computerized data system to facilitate data analysis for quality assurance.

# HIV COUNSELING, TESTING, AND REFERRAL

## Counselor and Provider Standards and Guidelines

### Risk Assessment

Risk assessment—an integral component of HIV prevention counseling—is based on the premise that certain behaviors increase risk for infection with HIV. The counselor should engage the client in a discussion which enables the client to recognize and accept personal risk for HIV. Because the risk-assessment process serves as the basis for assisting the client in formulating a plan to reduce risk, it is an essential component of all pretest counseling.

When the counselor assesses a client's risk or reviews risk information previously recorded by the client or a clinician, the approach should be thorough and individualized for each client. The counselor should accept that the client's disclosures concerning risk behaviors correspond to his or her readiness to initiate behavior change. Each counselor should develop effective interactive methods to involve the client in identifying risk behaviors.

#### *Standards*

- Assure the client that test results and other information he or she provides will remain confidential.
- Determine the client's prevention and clinical needs by engaging him/her in a discussion that addresses: client's reason for visit and other relevant concerns; other personal circumstances; client's resources and support systems; behavioral and other sources of risk, demographic and epidemiologic factors that influence risk; client awareness of risk; readiness to change behavior; and receptiveness to available services and referrals.
- Listen for and address, as appropriate, information such as the following:
  - Number of sex partners (casual and steady) and sexual activities including vaginal, anal, and oral sex, both receptive and insertive activities;
  - Sex with a person known to be HIV-positive;
  - Sharing needles or having sex with persons who share needles;
  - History of STDs and having sex with persons who have STDs, especially genital lesions;
  - Assessment of current STD symptom status;
  - Sex in exchange for drugs, money, or other inducements;
  - Use of substances such as alcohol, cocaine, etc., in connection with sexual activity;
  - History of HIV antibody testing and results;
  - Condom use; and

- Birth control—pregnancy prevention methods.
- Document acknowledged risk behavior, decisions about testing, and negotiated risk reduction plans in the client's record.

### *SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS*

- Risk assessment information may also be obtained by:
  - the clinician during the sexual/drug/medical history prior to or as a component of the counseling session;
  - utilizing a risk assessment tool completed by the client prior to the counseling session.

### HIV-Prevention Counseling

Counseling provides a critical opportunity to assist the client in identifying his or her risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV. Counseling also provides an opportunity to negotiate and reinforce a plan to reduce or eliminate the risk. Counseling prior to HIV testing, prevention counseling (pretest counseling), should prepare the client to receive and manage his or her test result. Prevention counseling should also: 1) facilitate an accurate perception of HIV risk for those who are unaware, uninformed, misinformed, or in denial; 2) translate the client's risk perception into a risk reduction plan that may be enhanced by knowledge of HIV infection status; 3) help clients initiate and sustain behavior changes that reduce their risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV. Unless it is prohibited by state law or regulation, clients should be offered reasonable opportunities to receive HIV-antibody counseling and testing services anonymously. The availability of anonymous services may encourage some persons at risk to seek services who would otherwise be reluctant to do so.

#### *Standards*

- Assure the client that test results and other information he or she provides will remain confidential.
- Discuss anonymous testing options.
- Provide client-centered counseling to:
  - Establish and/or improve the client's understanding of his/her HIV risk;
  - Assess the client's readiness to adopt safer behaviors by identifying behavior changes the client has already implemented; and
  - Negotiate a realistic and incremental plan for reducing risk.
- Discuss client's history of HIV testing and results.
- Involve the client in an assessment to determine his or her behaviors which result in a risk of acquiring HIV infection.
- Tailor the counseling session to the behaviors, circumstances, and special needs of the client.
- Assist the client in recognizing those behaviors which put him or her at risk for HIV.
- Identify steps already taken by the client to reduce risk and provide positive reinforcement.
- Identify barriers/obstacles to the client's previous efforts to reduce risk.
- Determine one or two behavioral changes the client may be

- willing to make to reduce risk.
- Discuss the steps necessary to implement these changes.
- Address any difficulties the client anticipates in taking these steps.
- Respond to the client's concerns.
- Provide the client with necessary referrals and a written copy of the risk reduction plan (this plan should not include any personal identifiers). For clients who cannot read, a verbal summary should be provided.
- Assist the client to arrive at an appropriate decision concerning HIV testing.
- Obtain informed consent from the client prior to testing.
- Establish a plan with the client to receive test results.

### *Guidelines*

- Document the risk assessment in the client's record for use during subsequent care.
- Document the risk reduction plan in the client's record.
- Ensure that the client understands the risks and benefits of knowing his or her HIV infection status.
- Discuss the client's expectations of test results.
- Discuss the client's plan to cope while waiting for test results.
- Explore with the client support systems that may be available.
- Ensure that the client understands what will happen during his or her visit to receive test results.
- Discuss the client's responsibility to disclose HIV infection status to sex/needle sharing partners.

### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

As part of the assessment, the counselor should ascertain the client's understanding of HIV transmission and the meaning of HIV antibody test results. When appropriate and relevant to the client, the counselor may:

- **Discuss what the virus is and how it is transmitted.**  
Assist the client to comprehend transmission of HIV and the delay between infection and development of a positive test.
- **Discuss what the test results mean and how they are used in medical management.**  
Negative Result - A negative test means that the person is either (1) not infected, or (2) so recently infected that the test could not detect the infection.  
Positive Result - A positive test means that the person is infected with HIV and can transmit it to others.
- **Discuss need for retest.**  
Clients engaging in continued high-risk behavior should be retested 6 months after the last possible exposure to any HIV risk. (See "**Counseling and Repeat Testing**" Section.)
- **Review risk reduction options with the client, for example:**
  - Abstain from sex and injecting street drugs; enroll in a drug treatment program.
  - Practice mutual monogamy between two HIV nega-

- tive persons.
- Use condoms to prevent STDs and HIV transmission.
- Modify sexual practices to low or no risk behaviors.
- Limit the number of sex partners.
- Disinfect drug injecting equipment and avoid sharing paraphernalia.
- **Advise persons with behavioral risk for HIV not to donate blood and not to use the blood bank as a means of periodic HIV testing.**
- **Discuss related healthy behaviors, for example:**
  - Limit the use of alcohol and other drugs.
  - Obtain family planning assistance, when appropriate.
  - Obtain early diagnosis and treatment for STDs, when appropriate.
- **Explain authorized disclosures and antidiscrimination protection.**
- **Discuss bringing a support person of the client's choice, at the time of receiving test results.**

### **Notification of HIV Results and Prevention Counseling**

Providing HIV antibody test results to a client involves interpretation that is based on the test result and the person's specific risk for HIV infection and dealing with the client's reaction to his/her test result. The client will most often focus on the result itself. Client-centered counseling is required to reassess behavioral risk that may influence the interpretation. When the client receives HIV test results, the primary public health purposes of counseling are (1) to reinforce perception of risk for those who are unaware or uninformed; (2) to help uninfected persons initiate and sustain behavior changes that reduce their risk of becoming infected; (3) to arrange access to necessary medical, prevention, and case management services for persons with a positive test result; (4) to assist those who may be infected to avoid infecting others and remain healthy; and (5) to support and/or assist infected clients to ensure the referral of as many sex or needle sharing partners as possible.

Knowledge of HIV status is an important piece of information a client can use in planning the scope of behavioral changes. Persons who abstain or have sexual relations with others who are known to be free of HIV infection and who do not use injecting drugs can essentially eliminate their risk of acquiring HIV. However, the consistent and correct use of condoms or the adoption of certain non-insertive sexual activities can greatly reduce the risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV. Although methods may be employed to reduce the risk of HIV from injecting drug use (such as the use of new needles), injecting drug use constitutes a health risk even in the absence of HIV and must be avoided.

The risk assessment and risk reduction plan developed during counseling prior to HIV testing provide a framework for strengthening efforts the client has already taken toward healthier behaviors and for recommending modifications based upon the HIV test result.

## Standards

- Review available documentation including the risk assessment, prior to meeting with the client.
- Assure the client that test results and other information he or she provides will remain confidential.
- Provide HIV positive test results only by personal contact, assuring a confidential environment.
- Provide counseling at the time results are given to:
  - Assess the client's readiness to receive HIV test results;
  - Interpret the result for the client, based on his or her risk for HIV infection;
  - Ensure that the client understands what the result means and address immediate emotional concerns; and
  - Renegotiate or reinforce the existing plan for reducing risk considering the client's HIV status.
- Discuss with the client the need to appropriately disclose HIV status.
- Assess the client's need for subsequent counseling or medical services.
- Develop a plan to access necessary resources and appropriate referrals.
- For use during subsequent clinical care, document test results, risk reduction plan, and identified need for any resources and referrals in the client's chart.
- Ensure that confidentially tested HIV infected clients who do not return for results and counseling are provided appropriate follow-up. Document all follow-up. Exhaustive efforts should be made to ensure that confidentially tested HIV infected clients are offered their HIV test results and counseling.

Interpretation of HIV antibody test results depends upon the client's risk behaviors. Some recently infected clients may have negative antibody tests. Indeterminate results may represent a recent HIV infection or a biologic false positive. Eliciting specific information about recent risk behavior is essential to accurate interpretation and counseling.

The client will likely encounter circumstances where it is appropriate to reveal their HIV infection status (e.g., to health care or dental providers; past, present, or potential sex and needle sharing partners). It is important to discuss such situations with the client and assist in developing a plan and skills for appropriate disclosure of HIV infection status.

## Guidelines

### I. Negative HIV Test Result

- Ensure that the client understands what the test result means including:
  - Limitations of test (i.e., time lag between infection and development of antibodies); and
  - Need for periodic retesting if the client partici-

pates in risk behaviors.

- Identify any steps already taken by the client to reduce risk and provide positive reinforcement.
- Encourage the client to continue avoiding risk behaviors.
- Determine one or two behavioral changes the client may be willing to make to reduce risk and discuss steps to implement these changes.
- Assist the client in building skills to negotiate risk reduction activities with current or potential partners through discussion and role plays.
- Offer referral for further assistance in avoiding risk behaviors and maintaining low-risk behaviors.
- Discuss his/her need and ability to help partners realize they are also at risk for HIV infection.
- Reinforce the importance of discussing risk reduction measures with potential partners; identify any difficulties the client perceives.
- Advise client about importance of early STD detection and treatment to reduce HIV risk.
- Advise client to refrain from donating blood, plasma, and organs.
- Advise client on access to other prevention and treatment services (i.e., drug treatment, psychosocial support, etc.)

### II. Positive HIV Test Result

Some HIV positive clients may be better prepared to receive positive test results than others. Counseling of patients with positive results must be directed to the client's specific circumstances and may require more than one session. Counselors should recognize that the emotional impact of learning about an HIV positive test result often prevents clients from absorbing other information during this encounter. Counselors may need to arrange additional sessions or provide appropriate referrals to meet the client's needs and accomplish the goals of counseling persons who are HIV positive.

- Allow time for the client's emotional response after learning his or her positive HIV result. A subsequent counseling session or follow-up telephone call may be required.
- Ensure that the client understands what the test result means.
- Assess the client's immediate needs for medical, preventive, and psychosocial support. (e.g., financial, personal, and other)
- Make the client aware of the need for additional medical evaluation and the availability of treatment.
- Establish a plan for continuing medical care and psychological support, including a subsequent prevention counseling session if necessary. As part of the plan, the counselor should:
  - Identify necessary referrals and assist the client with contacting them, and
  - Provide the client with written referral information.
- Reassess the client's risk for transmitting HIV infec-

tion.

- Help facilitate behavior change and/or reinforce behaviors that minimize or eliminate risk of transmission.
- Discuss with the client access and availability to ongoing prevention services including psychosocial and support services.
- Discuss with the client the responsibility to assure that sex and/or needle-sharing partners are counseled about their exposure to HIV and the need for them to seek medical evaluation.
- Assist the client in developing a plan which ensures that all partners are counseled about their exposure to HIV.
- Discuss how the client will notify other persons of his or her HIV status including future sex and needle-sharing partners, health care providers, and dental providers.
- Discuss with the client his or her specific plans for the next few days and ensure that the client has access to support systems during this time.
- Advise client to refrain from donating blood, plasma, and organs.

The current testing strategy of two EIA determinations followed by a supplemental test for confirmation, such as the Western blot, makes false positive test results extremely unlikely; however, the possibility of a mislabeled sample or laboratory error must be considered, and for a client with no identifiable risk for HIV infection, a repeat test may be appropriate.

### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- Clients whose results are HIV positive may have specific medical questions. Considering the complexity of medical questions, responses should be left to clinicians to whom the client is referred, or to counselors or case managers with specific expertise in this area.
- Some clients may be at very high risk of transmitting the virus to others. Sites are encouraged to provide, either on-site or through referral, additional prevention counseling (individual, couple, group, or peer), as appropriate to the needs of these clients.
- Counselors should appreciate the complexity of reproductive decision-making for HIV-infected women and must be familiar with the most recent Public Health Service recommendations on antiretroviral therapy to prevent vertical transmission. (1)

### **III. Indeterminate Test Result**

- Explain that the test result is inconclusive and may represent either:
  - a biologic false positive test, or
  - a truly positive test from a recent infection in

which antibodies have not yet fully developed.

- Schedule a repeat test approximately 6 weeks after the date of this inconclusive test.
- Emphasize that the client must take the same risk reduction precautions as persons testing HIV positive until the indeterminate finding is resolved.
- Assess the client's concerns and anxieties during the waiting period. If necessary,
  - arrange psychological referral to assist the client with coping while resolving the indeterminate test result,
  - provide a hotline telephone number(s) as a referral option, and
  - provide a subsequent counseling session or follow-up telephone call.

### **Counseling and Repeat Testing**

Situations where clients need repeat HIV counseling or request repeat HIV testing challenge and pose difficult issues for counselors. These situations include previously counseled persons who continue to place themselves or others at risk for infection, persons with indeterminate test results, seronegative persons with no risk who continue to request testing, and persons doubting or disbelieving their seropositive test results. Repeat testing is not advised as a substitute for initiating and maintaining safer behaviors.

#### *Standards*

- Assess the reasons the client requests repeat testing or continues risk behaviors.
- Emphasize that repeated testing for HIV will not prevent infection if the client continues to engage in risk behaviors.
- Arrange the specific services to meet the client's needs.
- Document all counseling activities, negotiated plans, and referrals in the client's record.

#### *Guidelines*

### **I. Persons with Continued Risk — Previous HIV Test Negative**

The counselor should:

- Review previous risk assessment and risk reduction plan with client.
- Proceed with HIV counseling as outlined in the Section, "**HIV Prevention Counseling.**"
- Provide alternative counseling options (e.g. referral to community based group or individual counseling) to the client to further help him or her understand his or her recidivist risk behavior(s) and modify the behaviors accordingly.
- Acknowledge incremental behavior changes, reinforce those which have reduced risk, and document in the client's chart.
- Identify obstacles which the client encountered in adopting safe behaviors.
- Explain potentially negative impact of HIV reinfection.

tion or exposure to other STDs.

## II. Persons with Continued Risk—Previous HIV Test Positive

- Explain the continued risk of infecting sex and needle sharing partners.
- Negotiate a plan with the client to prevent HIV transmission.
- Identify resources and alternative counseling options to ensure that the client implements this plan and to reinforce the importance of practicing safer behaviors to protect himself or herself and others.
- Reinforce the importance of informing partners and making risk-reduction decisions with partners.
- Ensure that the client understands the adverse impact of STDs and drug use upon immune function.

## III. Persons with Indeterminate Test Results

The counselor should:

- Arrange a repeat test approximately 6 weeks from the date of this current test;
- Assess the client's concerns and level of anxiety during the waiting period. If necessary, arrange psychological referral to assist the client in coping;
- Consider persons to be negative for antibodies to HIV if their Western Blot test results continue to be consistently indeterminate for at least 6 months in the absence of any known risk behaviors, clinical symptoms, or other findings (2);
- Encourage the client to follow guidelines outlined in the “**Notification of HIV Results and Prevention Counseling Section.**”

## IV. Persons with No Risk—Negative Test Results

The counselor should:

- Counsel the client on modes of HIV transmission and behaviors that place persons at risk for HIV;
- Counsel the client on unwarranted fears;
- Arrange referral for additional counseling for clients who continue to exhibit unfounded anxiety about HIV.

## V. Persons Who Doubt Previous Seropositive Test Results

The counselor should:

- Assess why the client doubts the accuracy of the test results;
- Explain the process of multiple tests to confirm a positive result;
- Assist the client in recognizing behaviors that lead to HIV infection.
  - For clients with no acknowledged risk for HIV, repeat the test.
  - For clients with behavioral risk for HIV, arrange for medical referral and repeat test, if necessary.

## REFERENCES

1. CDC. Zidovudine for the Prevention of HIV Transmission from Mother to Infant. *MMWR*, 1994;43(16):285-287.
2. CDC. Interpretation and use of the Western Blot Assay for Serodiagnosis of Human Immunodeficiency Virus Type 1 Infections. *MMWR*, 1989;38(S-7):1-7.

## Referral Process

A thorough client assessment often indicates a need for services that cannot be provided by the counselor. The counselor has two opportunities to make referrals: (1) the HIV prevention counseling session, and (2) the test notification/prevention counseling session.

### *Standards*

- Provide appropriate referral resources for:
  - Any client who may be in need of support to maintain safer behaviors,
  - HIV negative clients who continue to engage in risk behavior,
  - HIV negative clients who continue to test but are without risk,
  - HIV positive clients who continue to engage in risk behaviors, and
  - HIV positive clients with additional medical, social, or psychological needs.
- Provide the client with a written list of referrals including telephone numbers, addresses, hours of operation, and services provided.
- Document referrals in the client's record. Referrals made during the initial HIV prevention counseling session should be followed-up during the test notification/prevention counseling session.

### *Guidelines*

The counselor should:

- Offer referral to case management provider, if one is available;
- Seek feedback from the client about preferences for referrals, the accessibility of the referral, and the client's intention to follow through with the referral;
- Provide the client with relevant details about referral sites, e.g., the name of a specific contact person.

## *SPECIAL NOTE*

Any HIV positive or negative client who continues to engage in risk behaviors should know where and how to access STD

examination and treatment services.

## TERMS USED IN HIV PREVENTION

**ABSTINENCE:** Refraining from participating in something. When talking about HIV, abstinence refers to not engaging in sexual intercourse or injecting drugs.

**AIDS:** The acronym for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. AIDS can affect the immune and central nervous systems and can result in neurological problems, infections, or cancers. It is caused by HIV.

**ANAL SEX:** A type of sexual intercourse in which a man's penis enters his partner's anus.

**ANONYMOUS:** Without any identification. The term is used in regard to HIV testing when the persons ordering and performing the test do not maintain a record of the name or identity of the person whose blood they are testing.

**ANTIBODIES:** Proteins that are manufactured by the immune system in response to foreign substances.

**ANTIBODY TEST:** A laboratory procedure which detects antibodies to specific microorganisms. An HIV antibody test determines if a person's body has produced antibodies to HIV but does not detect the virus itself.

**ANTIDISCRIMINATION PROTECTION:** Provisions of laws that impose penalties for discrimination because of a person's HIV infection or perceived risk of infection.

**ANTIVIRAL:** Pertaining to something that inhibits the actions of a virus. Antiviral therapy refers to a treatment that works against the virus itself.

**ANUS:** The opening of the body through which feces or bowel movements pass. The anus is the part of the body which is penetrated during anal sex.

**APPROPRIATE DISCLOSURE:** Notifying specific people of a client's HIV risks or infection to other people because of their risk of exposure or their ability to provide medical assistance or support.

**ASYMPTOMATIC:** Being infected but having no symptoms of infection.

**BISEXUAL:** A person whose sex partners are both men and women. A bisexual can be a man or a woman.

**CD4 TESTING:** A laboratory blood test that counts a subset of white blood cells as an aid to determining immune function. Certain counts are indications for starting medications for persons with HIV infection.

**CLIENT:** A person to whom professional services are rendered.

**CLIENT-CENTERED APPROACH:** Refers to counseling conducted in an interactive manner responsive to individual client needs. Avoids a preconceived set of points to be made by the counselor and encourages the client to do most of the talking. Focuses on developing goals with the client rather than simply providing information or imposing counselor goals.

**CONDOM:** Commonly called rubbers, condoms are sheaths that fit over a man's penis or into a woman's vagina to prevent semen from entering the partner's body after ejaculation. Condoms also prevent a man's penis from coming in contact with his partner's body fluids.

**CONFIDENTIAL:** Kept private. In regard to HIV testing, it means that the results of a test are known only to the person who is being tested and the immediate group of people who provide care and prevention services for that person.

**COUNSELING:** Helping people plan actions that will benefit themselves or others. Unless designated as group counseling or couple counseling, the word is used here to describe one-on-one discussions.

**DISCORDANT:** Conflicting. Used to describe the circumstances in which one partner is infected with HIV and the other is not.

**EIA:** See ELISA.

**EARLY INTERVENTION:** The set of medical, preventive and psychosocial services provided to persons upon diagnosis of HIV infection. Involves monitoring indicators of immune function as signals to provide interventions to delay the onset of illness, psychosocial support, and measures to prevent transmission.

**ELISA:** Acronym for enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay. The laboratory test most commonly used to screen for antibodies to HIV. See Positive Test.

**FALSE-NEGATIVE:** A negative test result for a person who is actually infected.

**FALSE-POSITIVE:** A positive test result for a person who is actually not infected.

**HETEROSEXUAL:** A person whose sex partners are exclusively persons of the opposite sex.

**HIV:** Human immunodeficiency virus; the virus that causes AIDS.

**HOMOSEXUAL:** A person whose sex partners are exclusively members of the same sex. A homosexual man is called a gay man. A homosexual woman is called a lesbian.

**IMMUNE STATUS:** The state of the body's natural ability to fight diseases.

**IMMUNE SYSTEM:** The body's mechanism to identify and fight off infections and other foreign substances.

**INJECTED DRUGS:** Drugs that are introduced directly into a person's body or bloodstream through a needle. These include cocaine, crack, heroin, and steroids.

**INDETERMINATE:** Not determined one way or another. Inconclusive test results; the laboratory is unable to state whether antibody is present or not.

**INTERVENTION:** An action taken to change an outcome.

**MASTURBATION:** Stimulating a man's penis or a woman's clitoris.

**MONOGAMOUS:** Having an exclusive sexual relationship with only one partner. Mutual monogamy means neither partner has sex with other people.

**MORBIDITY:** Illness or disease.

**MORTALITY:** Death.

**NEGOTIATED RISK REDUCTION PLAN:** Discussions that result in identifying the steps that a client thinks he or she will take to reduce the chances of acquiring HIV. The counselor's role is to assist the client in developing a realistic plan.

**OUTREACH SERVICES:** Usually refers to services provided outside the walls of an agency. An outreach worker might go to a client's home or neighborhood.

**PARENTERAL:** Taken into the body through intravenous or intramuscular injection.

**PHLEBOTOMY:** Collecting a blood sample for laboratory testing by inserting a needle into a person's vein.

**POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT:** Acknowledging healthy behaviors or intentions through some mechanism that indicates approval, intended to be perceived as rewarding.

**POSITIVE TEST:** For HIV, a sample of blood that is reactive on an initial ELISA test, repeatedly reactive on a second ELISA run on the same specimen, and confirmed positive on Western blot or other supplemental test.

**PREVALENCE:** The total number of persons in a given population with a disease or condition at a given point in time.

**PREVENTION COUNSELING:** Counseling which is designed to facilitate the client's perception of risk, identify behavior changes that the client has already implemented and barriers to the client's previous efforts to reduce risk, and to assist the client in developing a plan to reduce risk regardless of whether or not he or she takes the test. Prevention counseling that takes place prior to HIV testing should prepare the client for receiving and managing his or her test results.

**PROBLEM-SOLVING TECHNIQUES:** A process by which a counselor tries to discover the basis of barriers indicated by some verbal or nonverbal communication from the client. After the barriers have been identified, possible solutions are discussed.

**PROPHYLACTIC TREATMENT:** Medications given to help prevent infection or its consequences.

**RETROVIRUS:** One of a group of RNA viruses. HIV is a retrovirus.

**RISK ASSESSMENT:** Used in this document, risk assessment is that portion of a client-centered discussion that encourages the client to identify and acknowledge his or her personal risk for acquiring HIV.

**SENSITIVITY:** The probability that a test will be positive when infection is present.

**SPECIFICITY:** The probability that a test will be negative when the infection is not present.

**SPERMICIDE:** A substance that kills sperm.

**TRIAGE ASSESSMENT:** The process that determines whether someone should be referred to counseling. Triage assessment facilitates prevention counseling services for those persons at increased risk for HIV.

**WESTERN BLOT:** A laboratory test that detects specific antibodies to components of a virus. Often used to confirm HIV antibodies in specimens found repeatedly reactive using the ELISA test for HIV antibodies.

# HIV COUNSELING, TESTING, AND REFERRAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

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