

# Secondary HIV Prevention

## Information for VA Health Care Providers

As people with HIV are healthier and are living longer, HIV prevention has become an even more important part of chronic illness management.

### What is secondary HIV prevention?

Prevention activities directed toward people who are living with HIV, with the intention of preventing transmission to those who are HIV negative. Secondary HIV prevention is sometimes referred to as prevention with positives. In contrast, primary prevention focuses on people who are not infected with HIV.

### What are the goals of secondary HIV prevention?

- ▶ Educate patients living with HIV on how to reduce the risk of HIV transmission to others.
- ▶ Engage individuals living with HIV to reduce risk practices (sexual and/or substance use behaviors).
- ▶ Support patients' ability to adhere to their HIV medications and maintain viral suppression. This is an extremely effective way to reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

### What are secondary HIV prevention activities that can take place in VA health care settings?

- ▶ Educating patients so they know that the risk of HIV transmission is reduced almost to zero when their HIV viral loads are continuously suppressed by ART.
- ▶ Supporting ART adherence efforts.

- ▶ Providing referrals for PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) for HIV-negative sex or drug-injecting partners.
- ▶ Prescribing condoms for people who are living with HIV (male and female condoms are listed on the VA National Formulary).
  - Condoms can also be obtained free of charge from some health departments and other community agencies.
- ▶ Encouraging people to disclose their HIV status to sex and drug-using partners.
- ▶ Screening for risky sexual behaviors and providing education on safer sex practices.
- ▶ Screening for STIs. The presence of STIs indicates unprotected sexual activity, and STIs themselves can increase the risk of HIV transmission. Treatment of STIs, can reduce the risk of HIV transmission.
- ▶ Screening for substance use (drugs and alcohol) and, when appropriate, referring patients to substance use treatment programs and syringe services programs.
- ▶ Providing mental health referrals for diagnosis and treatment of conditions that affect patients' ability to adhere to HIV treatment and/or to avoid risky behaviors.
- ▶ Screening for intimate partner violence (IPV) and referring patients (men and women) to IPV counselors as needed.
- ▶ Counseling on issues such as how to negotiate safer sex with a partner and/or disclose one's HIV status.
- ▶ Addressing issues of homelessness and inadequate social support to improve treatment adherence and viral suppression.
- ▶ Providing ongoing risk assessment, because patients' sexual and substance-use behaviors and their risk of transmitting HIV may change over time.



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## For patients with ongoing risk behaviors, how can VA health care providers help promote safer practices?

- ▶ Support adherence to ART: achieving and maintaining HIV viral suppression may be the most effective biomedical means of preventing HIV transmission.
- ▶ Assess why risky behaviors are continuing. Reasons may include knowledge or skill deficits, depression or other psychiatric illnesses, homelessness, or lack of access to resources. Make referrals, when appropriate, to VA and non-VA services that can address these issues.
- ▶ Assess patients' willingness to change risky behaviors using techniques such as motivational interviewing and the stages-of-change model.
- ▶ Refer patients to mental health and/or substance use counseling as appropriate.
- ▶ For patients who decline to use condoms, focus on adherence to ART, and on encouraging PrEP for partners.
- ▶ Provide educational materials explaining the importance of ART adherence, risk reduction, and safer sexual and drug use practices.
- ▶ Discuss the benefits of maintaining a healthy lifestyle (e.g., exercise, dietary changes) to improve overall quality of life.

## Who in VA medical centers, clinics, and Vet Centers can conduct secondary HIV prevention activities?

- ▶ Counselors in Vet Centers
- ▶ Case managers
- ▶ Nurse practitioners
- ▶ Nurses
- ▶ Pharmacists
- ▶ Physician assistants
- ▶ Physicians
- ▶ Psychiatrists
- ▶ Psychologists
- ▶ Social workers
- ▶ Substance abuse treatment providers
- ▶ Domiciliary counselors and staff
- ▶ Other health care providers

## Additional Resources

Persons with HIV: Prevention and Care, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/guidelines/persons.html>

National Harm Reduction Coalition <https://harmreduction.org/>

PrEP information for VA providers <https://www.hiv.va.gov/provider/topics/prep-index.asp>