



To: Sexual Health Clinics, Hospitals, Emergency Rooms, Community Health Centers, College Health Centers, Local Health Departments, Community Based Organizations, Internal Medicine, Family Medicine, Infectious Disease, Planned Parenthood, Primary Care Providers, Public Safety Community, and Urgent Care Centers

From: New York State (NYS) Department of Health (DOH), AIDS Institute

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HEALTH ADVISORY: INCREASED NUMBER OF HIV DIAGNOSES IN ERIE AND MONROE COUNTIES

- The number of new diagnoses of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection among residents of Erie and Monroe Counties has been increasing since early 2020.
- Preliminary data indicate that the Buffalo and Rochester regions experienced a 41% and 24% increase in 2020 respectively, compared to the average for 2018-2019.
- New HIV diagnoses in these regions continued to increase in the first half of 2021.
- Most of the increase in new HIV diagnoses is among non-Hispanic Black individuals, aged 25 and younger with a history of male-to-male sexual contact (MSM); a larger than expected number of individuals are of transgender experience.
- The first step in containing outbreaks or clusters is testing. In 2021 so far, contractors receiving AIDS Institute funds for targeted testing have provided HIV testing to just 8 and 34 Black MSM across the entire Western and Finger Lakes Ryan White regions, respectively. In comparison, such providers tested 115 Black MSM on average in 2017-2019 in each region. All providers in these communities are hereby directed to use AI funds to increase outreach to Black MSM and their social networks, for the purposes of providing HIV testing, PrEP, and other needed services to interrupt transmission.

What the Current Data Show

Both the Buffalo and Rochester Ryan White Regions¹ (RWR) saw an increased number of new HIV diagnoses in early 2020 after a noticeable decrease in 2018 and 2019. Although the number of new diagnoses in these regions declined during the middle of 2020, the number of new diagnoses increased to previous levels in late 2020 and the first half of 2021. Most of these diagnoses are in Erie and Monroe Counties, specifically the cities of Buffalo and Rochester.

Table 1. New HIV Diagnoses in Buffalo and Rochester Regions, 2018-2020

RWR	2018	2019	2020
Buffalo	68	79	104
Rochester	66	61	79

¹ Buffalo Ryan White Region includes Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Wyoming counties. Rochester Ryan White Region includes Chemung, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Wayne, and Yates counties.

Among the new diagnoses from the Buffalo Region in past 18 months, there was an increased proportion of young (below the age of 25), non-Hispanic Black individuals and those who report a history of MSM. Of the total new diagnoses, approximately 37% were below 25 years of age, 69% reported history of MSM sexual contact, and 47% were non-Hispanic Black individuals.

The Rochester Region saw a similar pattern of new diagnoses in the past 18 months. Of all new diagnoses, approximately 26% were among individuals below 25 years of age, 54% reported history of MSM and 45% were non-Hispanic Black individuals. Increases in reported HIV diagnoses in Monroe County have also been noted in an advisory released in October 2020².

A total of 13 individuals of transgender experience were diagnosed in the past 18 months across both regions, compared to only one in the 18 months prior to the increases.

The predominate behaviors reported by those newly diagnosed included condomless sex, sex with an anonymous partner, and sex while intoxicated and/or high on drugs.

Increases in reported gonorrhea and congenital syphilis diagnoses have also been noted in these counties, resulting in three health advisories released in the last 18 months.³ Furthermore, there has been an increase in new HIV diagnoses concurrent with gonorrhea and syphilis diagnoses, as well as sexually transmitted infection (STI) diagnoses among persons living with diagnosed HIV, over the same time period.

What Health Care Providers Can Do to Prevent HIV, Hepatitis C (HCV), STIs and Support Sexual Health

- **Offer and perform HIV testing** for every patient age 13 years and older.
- Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, **expeditious initiation of antiretroviral therapy (ART) in people newly diagnosed with HIV** remains a high priority and can be accomplished with modest adjustments to the established protocol⁴. See the NYSDOH AIDS Institute's Guidance: Rapid Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) Initiation During COVID-19⁵ document which aims to assist primary care providers and other clinicians in adjusting the protocol for implementing rapid ART initiation during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Offer and perform HCV testing** for every patient age 18 years and older. Injection drug use (IDU) is the most common risk factor for HCV transmission. People who inject drugs, even once in their lifetime, should be tested for HCV. Annual HCV testing is recommended for those with on-going risk, such as IDU, HIV-infected MSM and MSM on pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).
- **Conduct a complete sexual health history, risk and drug use assessment** for every patient. Ask about specific behaviors that may increase one's risk of HIV, HCV, or other STIs, such as the number of sex partners, type of sex (i.e., vaginal, anal, oral), sex of sex partners, and drugs used and route of drug ingestion, to help guide laboratory testing. Visit www.ncshguide.org/providers for guidance and additional resources.
- **Screen** for HIV and/or STIs:
 - Persons presenting with evidence of active injection drug or other drug use
 - Sexually active MSM, at least annually; every 3 to 6 months if at increased risk
 - Sexually active persons regardless of HIV status, at least annually

² https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/providers/health_advisories/docs/health_advisory_monroe.pdf

³ https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std/docs/health_advisory_gonorrhea.pdf,
https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std/docs/health_advisory_gonorrhea_0221.pdf,
https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/std/docs/health_advisory_syphilis.pdf

⁴ https://www.hivguidelines.org/antiretroviral-therapy/when-to-start-plus-rapid-start/#tab_4

⁵ <https://www.hivguidelines.org/antiretroviral-therapy/rapid-art-covid-19/>

- All persons with newly diagnosed HIV
- Persons previously and/or currently diagnosed with STIs
- Persons presenting with signs and symptoms that might indicate the presence of an acute HIV infection and/or an STI
- Sex or needle sharing partners of people with HIV/STIs
- Pregnant people at their first prenatal visit and during the third trimester. For complete information on screening, diagnosing, and treating syphilis in pregnancy, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2015 STD Treatment Guidelines⁶.
- **Test** at the anatomic site(s) of sexual exposure and offer three-site testing for gonorrhea and chlamydia.
- **Treat promptly or link patients immediately to care and treatment** to interrupt the spread of HIV, syphilis, and other STIs.
- **Refer** all patients diagnosed with HCV for treatment if HCV treatment is not offered onsite.
- **Offer** Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP).
- **Facilitate partner management** by offering and providing [Expedited Partner Therapy \(EPT\)](#) as appropriate, and encouraging your patients to refer their sex or needle sharing partners to medical care for testing, STI treatment, and HIV prophylaxis.
- **Collaborate** with State and County public health personnel on partner notification efforts. Expect the Health Department to contact you and/or your patient for additional information.
- **Refer** consenting individuals living with HIV and people engaging in behaviors that put themselves at risk of acquiring HIV to community based organizations (CBOs) for support services.
- **Register** the clinical services (e.g., HIV, HCV, PrEP, PEP, Buprenorphine, STI services) provided at your facility/practice on the AIDS Institute Provider Directory at <https://providerdirectory.aidsinstituteny.org/Register/RegisterCreate>.
- **Update** the clinical services (e.g., HIV, HCV, PrEP, PEP, Buprenorphine, STI services) provided at your facility/practice on the AIDS Institute Provider Directory at <https://providerdirectory.aidsinstituteny.org/Register/RegisterEditList>.
- **Report** newly diagnosed cases of HIV and/or AIDS using the Provider Portal on the NYSDOH Health Commerce System at <https://commerce.health.ny.gov> or the paper DOH-4189 Medical Provider HIV/AIDS and Partner/Contact Report Form (PRF). Completion of the PRF within 14 days of diagnosis is required by Public Health Law.
- **Report** all suspected and confirmed STI diagnoses promptly to your local county health department. Information is available at www.health.ny.gov/forms/doh-389.pdf and www.health.ny.gov/forms/instructions/doh-389_instructions.pdf.
- **Ensure** your employees and colleagues have access to current information and tools to promote health equity. Please visit <https://www.hivtrainingny.org/Home/healthequity> and <https://www.cdc.gov/std/health-disparities/default.htm> for more information.
- **Sign up** for the AI Provider Directory: <https://providerdirectory.aidsinstituteny.org/>

What Community Based Organizations Can Do to Support Sexual Health, Drug User Health, and Prevent HIV, HCV and other STIs

- **Assess risk:** conduct a comprehensive behavioral sexual risk assessment for program participants/clients. Ask about specific behaviors, such as the number of partners, type of sex (i.e., vaginal, anal, oral), sex of partners, drugs used, and route of drug ingestion to help guide lab testing.

⁶<https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/toc.htm>

- **Provide harm reduction services:** facilitate access to clean syringes and essential support services for people who inject drugs. Syringes should be provided to ensure a sterile syringe for every projected injection and without limiting access. There are three mechanisms to provide sterile syringes in NYS – syringe exchange, second tier syringe exchange, and the expanded syringe access program. In addition, provide syringe disposal options for people with used syringes. Individuals should be trained in how to recognize an overdose, trained in how to respond to an overdose, and provided with naloxone. To become a registered Opioid Overdose Program or to facilitate access to and disposal of syringes please see https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/consumers/prevention/needles_syringes/index.htm
- **Implement targeted client recruitment:** prioritize agency services to identify individuals who do not access health care services or who may not otherwise have access to HIV and STI testing in clinical settings. These persons may benefit most from HIV and STI testing services in nonclinical settings.
- **Conduct HIV/STI testing activities to key priority populations:** Provide venue based and/or mobile HIV/STI testing; offer HIV testing to persons who are tested for STIs; provide HIV Self-Test kits. Clients residing outside of NYC can text the word “Test” to 40457 to see if they are eligible to receive a free HIV Self-Test Kit.
- **Provide easy access buprenorphine:** as part of comprehensive harm reduction services, individuals with opioid use disorder should be offered access to buprenorphine in a non-punitive way via a variety of settings.
- **Offer navigation services:** assist persons living with HIV, or persons placed at risk of acquiring HIV, to obtain timely, essential, and appropriate medical, prevention, and support services (including PrEP/PEP) to optimize health and prevent HIV/STI/HCV transmission and acquisition.
- **Provide effective behavioral interventions:** implement prevention activities that are culturally relevant and have been shown to be successful by evaluation or research.
- **Engage in condom promotion, education, and distribution:** make condoms available at no cost and increase access to condoms in ways that reduce embarrassment or discomfort when acknowledging sexual activity. Information about the NYS Condom Program is available at <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/consumers/condoms/nyscondom.htm>
- **Work with existing coordinating and community planning bodies** such as NYS Ending the Epidemic regional steering committees, the NYS HIV Advisory Body, and NY Links to plan, promote and conduct community education events/activities, foster dialogue, and share resources.
- **Use technology and social media platforms** to promote partner services, increase general awareness, provide accurate and science-based education, and address misinformation. Social media efforts should be informed by contextual factors such as culture, language, health literacy levels, norms, stigma, discrimination, and health care disparities. Partner services public service announcement available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63hsXYucSrs>
- **Collaborate** with public health stakeholders including county departments of health, regional partner services staff, other AIDS Institute funded providers, CBOs (including non-AIDS service organizations), medical providers, behavioral health providers, etc. to discuss the health advisory, communicate current services, and develop a local response plan and/or collaboration agreements (as needed) to best serve the needs of the priority populations.
- **Share** this information with the communities you serve through announcements, press releases, medical and community communications and digital and social media avenues.
- **Ensure** your employees and colleagues have access to current information and tools to promote health equity. Please visit <https://www.hivtrainingny.org/Home/healthequity> and <https://www.cdc.gov/std/health-disparities/default.htm> for more information.
- **Sign up** for the AI Provider Directory: <https://providerdirectory.aidsinstituteny.org/>

Additional Resources

Free and confidential HIV and STI testing is available at local health department sexual health clinics. <https://providerdirectory.aidsinstituteny.org/>

HIV Testing Toolkit: Resources to Support Routine HIV Testing for Adults and Teens
http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/providers/testing/docs/testing_toolkit.pdf Clients residing outside of NYC can text the word “Test” to 40457 to see if they are eligible to receive a free HIV Self-Test Kit.

New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute Provider Directory
<https://providerdirectory.aidsinstituteny.org/>

NYS Department of Health HIV/AIDS Hotline: 1-800-541-AIDS
<https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/index.htm>

Clinical Education Initiative Sexual Health Center of Excellence - Clinicians can call the Clinical Education Initiative (CEI Line) at 1-866-637-2342 to access expert medical consultation on diagnosis, treatment and management of HIV, HCV, and STI infections and sexual and drug user health. Training calendar and archived webinar are available at <https://ceitraining.org/>.

NYS DOH AIDS Institute Clinical Guidelines for HIV/HCV/PrEP/PEP <https://hivguidelines.org>

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Non-Occupational Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)
https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/general/about/strategic_planning.htm#prep

Consumer PEP Hotline – 844-PEP4NOW (844-737-4699) Available 24/7

HIV Clinician Reporting and NYSDOH Partner Services
https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/providers/regulations/partner_services/

Bureau of HIV/AIDS Epidemiology at 518-474-4284 for information and assistance with HIV reporting.

Office of Sexual Health and Epidemiology at 518-474-3598 or stdc@health.ny.gov for information and assistance with STI reporting.

Partner Services Public Service Announcement for Providers Educate yourself and your team on the services offered by partner services and how partner services can extend the continuum of care to your patients, their partners, and others who may have been exposed
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cumGb4ASugk>

Local Health Department and NYSDOH Regional Contacts for Partner Services

- NYSDOH Rochester Regional Office 585-423-8100
- Monroe County Department of Health 585-753-2991
- NYSDOH Western Region (Buffalo) 716-847-4302
- Erie County Department of Health 716-858-7690

Free and confidential HCV testing is available at locations across NYS.
https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/hepatitis/hepatitis_c/providers/testing_locations.htm