



HIV/STD

Partner Services: The Health Provider's Role

HOW CAN YOU REASSURE YOUR PATIENTS ABOUT HEALTH DEPARTMENT INVOLVEMENT?

- Health departments have a long and excellent record of handling partner notification confidentially.
- Patients and partners are treated non-judgmentally and with respect.
- Health department notification ensures confidential, consistent and accurate information for patients and partners.

WHAT IS EXPEDITED PARTNER THERAPY?

- Expedited Partner Therapy (EPT) is the treatment of partner(s) of patients diagnosed with an STD without an intervening exam.
- While it would be ideal if every sex partner underwent a medical exam, EPT is an effective option when this is not feasible. EPT facilitates prompt partner treatment, prevents re-infection and reduces transmission to other sex partners.
- EPT should be offered to all women and heterosexual men infected with chlamydia or gonorrhea. Research has shown that HIV/STD co-morbidities are uncommon among women and heterosexual men who sought treatment after exposure to an individual with chlamydia or gonorrhea. Additionally, no allergic reactions to the oral medications used in the treatment of gonorrhea and chlamydia have been reported.
- EPT is not recommended for use among men who have sex with men because of increased HIV and syphilis co-morbidity in this population. EPT should not be used among partners with symptoms – especially if they have fever, pelvic, testicular, groin, or abdominal pain. These partners need a clinical evaluation.
- EPT is expressly allowed under Texas Administrative Code, Title 22, §190.8.

Additional Disease Reporting Resources:

DSHS HIV/STD Program Disease Reporting:

dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/reporting/

DSHS HIV/STD Program EPT:

dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/ept/

DSHS HIV/STD Program:

737-255-4300

Texas Statutes:

statutes.legis.state.tx.us

Texas Administrative Code:

sos.state.tx.us/tac/



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THE ULTIMATE GOALS OF PARTNER SERVICES ARE:

- Decrease HIV/STD incidence
- Prevent transmission
- Avoid re-infection
- Promote healthy behavior changes that reduce the likelihood of infection.

Here is how health providers can help.

WHAT ARE YOUR LEGAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS AS A PROVIDER?

- You are required to report HIV, AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, and chancroid to your local health department under Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 81, Subchapter C. Rules governing reporting can be found in Texas Administrative Code, Title 25, Chapter 97.
- You are required to submit a complete disease reporting form to the health department in a timely manner.
- You must report primary and secondary syphilis to your local health department by telephone within one working day.
- You must report other STDs, including HIV, within seven working days.

WHAT ELSE CAN PROVIDERS DO?

- Routinely screen and treat patients for STDs, including HIV, in accordance with CDC guidelines.
- When you diagnose patients with HIV/STD, talk with them about the need to notify their sex partner(s). Let your patients know that the health department may contact them to help them confidentially notify their sex partner(s).
- Offer Expedited Partner Therapy (EPT) when appropriate.

- Work with local health department staff to provide relevant and accurate information to your patients.
- Encourage patients to work with health department partner services programs.

WHAT ARE PARTNER SERVICES?

Partner services are a broad array of services available to persons with HIV/AIDS, syphilis, gonorrhea, or chlamydia and their sex and needle-sharing partners. Partner services are designed to:

- Confidentially identify persons with HIV and/or STD infection
- Notify partners of diagnosed patients of their possible exposure
- Provide infected persons and their partners with a range of medical, prevention and psychosocial services

Partner services include:

- **Partner treatment and/or testing** by the index patient's provider
- **Partner referral** to another provider like an STD clinic
- **Partner notification** by the patient, the provider or trained public health professionals called Disease Intervention Specialists (DIS).

WHAT IS PARTNER NOTIFICATION?

- **Partner notification** is the process of contacting persons who have had sex or shared needles with someone diagnosed with HIV or other STDs to offer them testing, treatment and counseling services. Partner notification is a critical step to stem the transmission of STDs to uninfected partners and help persons avoid re-infection.
- Partner notification can be done by patients, healthcare providers or a DIS. DIS partner notification has been shown to be the most effective method of partner notification.

However, most health departments limit DIS partner services to early syphilis and newly diagnosed HIV cases. Partner notification by patients is usually the most feasible approach for other STDs.

- Most commonly, patients notify partners themselves. Major drawbacks of this approach are difficulties in identifying and contacting non-regular partners, low rates of partner contact and treatment, and partner non-compliance in seeking care after notification.
- Partners are much more likely to be notified and come in for treatment when notified by Disease Intervention Specialists (DIS), who are trained health professionals.
- Patients can avoid emotional or even violent confrontations.
- DIS and other trained health department personnel use the utmost discretion to notify persons at risk, never revealing anything about the original patient.
- Patients and their partners are treated non-judgmentally and with respect.
- The patients decide which partner(s) they will inform and which partner(s) the health department will locate and notify.
- The DIS can coach patients on how to approach any discussion with their partner(s).
- The DIS will discuss the infection, treatment and prevention of STDs and answer any questions the patient or their partners have about his/her situation. DIS also make referrals for additional services.