



TO: Washington State Local Health Jurisdictions & Healthcare Providers  
FROM: Scott Lindquist, MD, MPH, State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases  
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SUBJECT: Health Advisory

## **Washington healthcare providers urged to take action to help prevent HIV**

An Increase in newly diagnosed HIV infections among people who inject drugs in King County, WA has prompted the Washington State Department of Health to issue a health advisory requesting that health care providers throughout Washington State increase their HIV testing among patients reporting current or recent injection drug use. Early detection and treatment of acute HIV infection is essential to safeguard the health of people living with HIV and reduce forward transmission.

### **Washington State Department of Health requests that health care providers take the following actions:**

#### **1. Assess and evaluate patients for HIV risk factors:**

- Elicit behavioral risk history including injection drug use, transactional sex, methamphetamine use, unstable housing/homelessness. [Click this link](#) for information on taking a comprehensive sexual history, which can be adapted for taking a drug use history.
- Asymptomatic people who inject drugs should be tested for HIV, hepatitis C, and syphilis at least annually. For current national recommendations for [routine HIV](#) and [hepatitis C](#) testing click the links. For information on increases in syphilis among people who inject drugs [click here](#).
- All people who inject drugs who present with symptoms consistent with acute HIV infection (e.g., fever, fatigue, myalgia, headache, pharyngitis, adenopathy) should be tested for HIV.

#### **2. Promptly report new cases of HIV infection to your local health jurisdiction:**

Provide as much risk history, clinical, and demographic data (including complete contact information for the patient) as you can obtain. To report a new case of HIV infection to your local health jurisdiction [visit this link](#).

#### **3. Link all people recently diagnosed or living with untreated HIV to care for full evaluation, follow-up, and prompt initiation of antiretroviral therapy.**

Focused efforts should be made to optimize treatment adherence and retain patients in care. The Washington State Department of Health administers programs to help people at risk for HIV and people living with HIV access

medication, medical care, and support to improve their health. For more information, call 877-376-9316 or [visit this link](#).

**4. Offer HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to people who inject drugs, and recommend PrEP initiation to people who inject drugs who exchange sex.**

For information on PrEP in Washington State [visit the link](#).

**5. If needed, request support for HIV partner notification and linkage to support services and insurance.**

To be referred to your local health jurisdiction or a field service consultant serving your region, call the Washington State Department of Health's Office of Infectious Disease at 360-236-3425 or [visit this link](#).

**6. Provide people who inject drugs with information about where to access sterile injection equipment.**

For a current listing of syringe service programs in Washington State [click here](#).

**7. Provide information about substance use treatment programs, including information about availability of medication assisted therapies, to patients interested in reducing or ceasing drug use.**

For a current listing of substance use treatment programs in Washington State visit the [WA Recovery Helpline](#).

**8. Educate people who inject drugs about the availability of naloxone to prevent overdose death.**

Opioid overdose death is preventable with naloxone. [Visit this link](#) for more information about naloxone, including where people can access it.

**Background:** Between 2017 and 2018, the number of new HIV diagnoses among heterosexuals who inject drugs in King County, Washington increased from 7 to 30 cases, a 328% increase. This ongoing increase in newly diagnosed HIV infections appears similar to outbreaks of HIV among people who inject drugs that have been identified in both urban and rural areas elsewhere in the United States. A recent similar increase in cases among heterosexuals who inject drugs in Snohomish County raises concerns about the potential for another cluster in Washington State. To date, the Washington State Department of Health has not observed a similar increase in HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs in other regions of the state. However, based on surveillance and analysis of the risk environment, identification of additional cases is expected, and the Washington State Department of Health is concerned that areas outside of King County are vulnerable to increases in HIV transmission among people who inject drugs.

**Please share this health advisory with providers working with people who inject drugs.**