

HIV Testing and Linkage to Care in Emergency Departments

Why are EDs Critical for HIV Testing?

- ▶ **Accessibility:** Often the primary point of contact for individuals without regular healthcare access.
- ▶ **Proactive Diagnosis:** A significant number of HIV diagnoses occur during ED visits.
- ▶ **Timely Linkage to Services:** HIV testing in EDs can link clients to the appropriate care or prevention resources quickly.
- ▶ **Improved Public Health Outcomes:** Testing supports CDC recommendations for routine HIV screening to reduce transmission and improve health outcomes.

How is HIV Testing Implemented in the ED?

- ▶ **Offered as an Opt-out Test:** Standard practice where patients are informed of testing as routine care unless they decline. In Washington, D.C., opt-out testing is mandated for patients aged 13-64 in the ED.
- ▶ **Integrated into Workflow:** Seamlessly integrated testing can begin during triage.
- ▶ **Offered to Address Co-morbidities:** Testing as part of a comprehensive evaluation for patients with co-existing conditions (e.g., tuberculosis, hepatitis, substance use disorders, mental health disorders).

After the HIV Test, What Are the Next Steps?

Linkage to Care (LTC)

All patients should receive clear, affirming counseling tailored to their results, whether negative or reactive. Confirmatory testing should be offered for reactive results. If the result is negative, discuss HIV prevention options like PrEP, assess ongoing risk, and offer follow-up testing guidance.

Linkage to Care should be:

- ▶ **Timely:** Aim for the first medical clinic visit within one month of the test result.
- ▶ **Collaborative:** Establish relationships with local HIV clinics/providers for seamless referrals.
- ▶ **Engaging:** Address barriers like stigma, misinformation, and healthcare access.

Connect a Client to Peer Support or Community Health Workers (CHWs)

Peer navigators and CHWs (often with lived experience) offer emotional support and practical assistance, helping patients navigate the healthcare system.

Peers and CHWs can:

- ▶ **Coordinate Case Management:** Coordinate comprehensive care plans, linking clients to medical, psychosocial, and support services.
- ▶ **Implement Best Practices:** Emphasize training, clear role definition, cultural competence, and monitoring.

Address Non-Medical Barriers to Care

- ▶ **Reduce Stigma:** Foster safe environments, provide education, and encourage open communication.
- ▶ **Improve Mental Health:** Screen for and support co-occurring mental health issues.
- ▶ **Increase Access to Healthcare:** Address transportation, insurance, financial, and language barriers.
- ▶ **Address Health Literacy:** Provide clear, simple information using plain language and visual aids.
- ▶ **Enhance Provider Collaboration:** Encourage multidisciplinary team approaches (social workers, nutritionists, mental health professionals).
- ▶ **Bridge Prevention Gaps:** Ensure patients who test negative are not left without guidance or referrals to PrEP, mental health, or social services.

Where can I Learn More About HIV Testing and Linkage to Care?

Training is available at no cost from the Effi Barry Training Institute and HealthHIV. The following links provide learning opportunities and resources for ED and UCC staff:

- ▶ [HIV Testing and Linkage to Care in Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Settings](#)
- ▶ [Touch Points in Community Health: Pan-Viral Testing and Linkage to Care in Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Centers](#)
- ▶ [Doxy-PEP Ready: A Toolkit for Fast-Action STI Prevention in Emergency Departments, Urgent Care, and Student Health Settings](#)
- ▶ [Applying Status Neutral Approaches to End the HIV Epidemic in DC](#)

- ▶ **Cultural Competence and Sensitivity:** Educating staff on stigma reduction and culturally sensitive care is an important component to ensuring high quality care. The following training modules offer additional information about addressing implicit bias and intersectionality:
 - ▶ [Addressing Stigma and Stigmatizing Language in the Workplace](#)
 - ▶ [Engaging African Immigrants in HIV Prevention and Care](#)
 - ▶ [Healthcare and Cultural Ties: Understanding the Intersections of Health, Well-Being, and HIV](#)
 - ▶ [Opportunities and Barriers to Transgender & Nonbinary Healthcare Equity and Inclusion Excellence](#)
 - ▶ [Shifting Perspectives: The Dynamics of Bias in Individuals and Systems](#)

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Effi Barry Training Institute (EBTI), led by HealthHIV, provides capacity building assistance to HIV service providers, community organizations, and public health professionals in DC to advance equitable HIV prevention and care. The EBTI provides resources to support program implementation, workforce development, and community engagement.

The Clinical Strategies for HIV Prevention Series showcases strategies redefining the HIV prevention landscape. This series offers healthcare providers actionable strategies to stay ahead in the evolving fight against HIV.

Need training or technical assistance?

Health and community organizations can scan the QR code to request free Capacity Building Assistance (CBA) through the Effi Barry Training Institute.

