

Paving the Way for Policy: Routine HIV Testing in Texas Medical Care Settings

In 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued revised recommendations to integrate routine HIV screening for all patients in health care settings for all persons aged 13 to 64 years. The guidelines were issued to address the following problems:

- 1) People accessing health care are not routinely tested for HIV. For each person not tested, another opportunity is lost to detect, treat, and reduce HIV transmissions;
- 2) One in five people with HIV in the U.S. do not know they are infected; and
- 3) Many persons are not diagnosed until they have been living with HIV and unknowingly continue to expose others for many years.

Routine HIV screening can lead to early diagnosis and is associated with:

- Better health outcomes and longer survival.
- More cost effective and better treatment choices.
- Lower viral loads.
- Reduction of risk behaviors.
- Reduced sexual transmissions.

Texas law supports routine testing:

- Texas does not require a separate consent form for HIV testing.
- General consent for medical care includes HIV testing.
- Documented verbal (informed) consent is sufficient.
- Pretest counseling is not required.

DSHS HIV routine testing programs progress to date:

- Support routine testing in over 40 sites, including emergency departments, community health centers, STD clinics, and correctional facilities.
- Over 180,000 HIV tests have been performed.
- Over 1,900 HIV cases have been identified.

The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and the Test Texas HIV Coalition is committed to supporting expanded, routine, integrated and sustainable HIV testing in health care settings by:

- Funding demonstration projects.
- Supporting promotion through peer advocacy.
- Examining ways to create policy and practice within public health.
- Working with Health and Human Services to examine language in Medicaid provider manuals to make routine testing the standard of care in DSHS-funded health care facilities.