

Small Talks ABOUT

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Partner Services programs reduce the spread of HIV by helping your patients inform partners.

Partner Services

Small Talks ABOUT **Partner Services**

A 2007 systematic review showed

20%

of partners tested by Partner Services test positive for HIV and were previously undiagnosed.¹

What is Partner Services?

Partner Services provides an array of free services to persons with HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (such as syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydial infection) and their partners. Partner Services is a function of local and state health department staff who help to identify and locate sex or drug-injection partners to inform them of their risk and to provide them testing, counseling, and referrals for other services.

- ▶ For partners testing positive, Partner Services can provide linkage to care and treatment, risk-reduction counseling, and other services.
- ▶ For those testing negative, appropriate prevention counseling and access to other services may lead to improvements in sexual and drug-use behaviors.

Health Care Provider/Practice Role in Initiating Partner Services

While you are not expected to take on the role of partner notification yourself, it is very helpful for health care providers to educate their patients about Partner Services and its importance in preventing the spread of infection.

For patients being tested for HIV/STDs

- ▶ Talk with your patients about Partner Services and let them know that if they test positive for a reportable disease, they may be contacted by someone from the health department.
- ▶ Discuss how Partner Services can help them and their sex or drug-injection partners through early access to testing, treatment, and other services.
- ▶ Emphasize the importance of participating in the Partner Services process as a way to help stop the spread of HIV/STDs.
- ▶ Conduct brief discussions with your patient about safer sexual and drug-use behaviors.

Health Care Provider/Practice Role in Initiating Partner Services (continued)

For newly diagnosed HIV-infected patients

- ▶ If you are seeing a patient for the first time, speak with him or her about Partner Services to determine if it was previously addressed; if not, repeat the same process listed on page 3.

For patients living with HIV

- ▶ For patients who present with an STD or inform you of unsafe behavior, consider the following:
 - Make patient aware that he or she may be contacted by someone from the health department.
 - Discuss strategies to reduce transmission behaviors.
 - Make a direct referral to the Partner Services program.
 - Consider making a referral to a community-based organization or other agency that offers Comprehensive Risk Counseling Services.

Best Practice: When the Health Department Informs Partners

When health departments take responsibility for notification, more partners are successfully notified of their exposure.² For patients, this method helps maintain their anonymity and relieves them of the burden of disclosure. Additionally, it links patients to other resources, such as counseling and risk-reduction services. For the exposed partner, this method facilitates quick access to testing and linkage to care for treatment and other services.

Methods used by health departments to inform partners

There are a few methods used to notify sex or drug-injection partners (formally known as Partner Notification) that they have been exposed to an infectious disease, including the following:

1. Health department tells patient's partners ("Provider referral")

- Your patients provide partner names to the health department.
- Partners are located and made aware of their exposure by health department staff.
- Partners are provided, or referred for, counseling, testing, treatment, and other services by the health department.

Methods used by health departments to inform partners (continued)

2. Patient tells partners (“Self referral”)

- Your patients take on the responsibility of letting their partners know of their exposure.
- Your patients provide their partners the information on local services, including counseling and testing.

3. Both the patient and the health department tell partners (“Dual referral”)

- Your patients let their partners know of their exposure with health department staff.
- Health department staff is there to help your patients during the process and provide their partners with information, access to counseling, testing, and other resources.

HIV-infected patients who present with gonorrhea or chlamydial infection

Due to resource limitations, health departments do not always follow up on cases of gonorrhea or chlamydial infection. If an HIV-infected patient presents with either of these STDs, it is important that you alert health departments of this co-infection to ensure appropriate follow up with exposed partners.

Partner Services Facts

It is estimated that approximately 18% of those living with HIV in 2009 were unaware of their infection, and were responsible for approximately 30% of new infections in the United States.³

20% of the partners tested by Partner Services programs tested positive for HIV and were previously undiagnosed.¹

In November 2008, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released an MMWR with recommendations for Partner Services programs, creating a renewed focus on this public health priority.⁴

Reportable diseases and your patient

Health care providers and clinical laboratories are required by law to report certain types of infections to their local or state health departments. If your patient tests positive for one of these infections, he or she will likely be contacted by someone from the health department. Therefore, it's important to let patients know that the health department may contact them if they test positive for one of the reportable infections and that this is a normal procedure.

The list of reportable infections may vary from state to state, but typically includes HIV, syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydial infection. Other infections may also be reportable, and it is important for health care providers to know which ones are reportable in their areas.

Goals of Partner Services

The goals of Partner Services include the following:

- 1.** Provide services to persons infected with HIV or other STDs, including providing them risk-reduction counseling, linking them to medical care, and making referrals to other services (e.g., psycho-social support and prevention interventions).
- 2.** Ensure that sex and drug-injection partners of persons with HIV or other STDs are notified of their exposure, provided counseling and testing, treated or linked to medical care if needed, and provided other appropriate referrals.
- 3.** Reduce future rates of transmission by aiding in early diagnosis treatment regimen.

How Partner Services works in your area

To learn more about how Partner Services works in your area and to obtain information about state and local laws related to Partner Services, contact your local or state health department. To find your local health department, go to:

www.healthfinder.gov/Organizations/StateAgencies

How Partner Services helps you

Partner Services programs are not intended to have you, the health care provider, take on more responsibility. In fact, they are designed to relieve your workload by offering another free resource to help your patients notify their sex or drug-injection partners of their possible exposure to an infectious disease. Other benefits include:

- ▶ Presents an opportunity for you to identify unsafe transmission behaviors and discuss how to reduce those behaviors with your patients.
- ▶ Leverages your relationship with patients and maximizes that trust to help stop the spread of HIV and other STDs.

How Partner Services programs help your patients

- ▶ Ensures that trained professionals contact your patient and inform his or her partners of their exposure without using your patient's name, removing the burden of disclosure from your patient.
- ▶ Ensures that adequate time is spent coaching your patient on how to inform his or her partners about their exposure, if the patient chooses this method.
- ▶ Increases your patients' knowledge about how to protect themselves and maintain their own health.
- ▶ Presents another free resource for your patient to access education and counseling about how to live successfully with HIV.
- ▶ Helps partners get tested quickly and facilitates timely treatment or linkage to care.

An Opportunity to Reinforce How to Prevent Transmission

Whether your patient is newly diagnosed with HIV or another STD or has lived with HIV for many years, Partner Services discussions provide another critical opportunity to talk with your patients about adopting safer sexual and drug-use behaviors.

If you determine your patient is participating in high-risk behavior, consider making a referral to a Comprehensive Risk Counseling Services program. These programs are designed to offer patient-centered behavioral counseling and interventions.

Health Department

Contact: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Web: _____

References

1. Hogben, M., McNally, T., McPheeters, M., & Hutchinson, A. B. (2007). The effectiveness of HIV partner counseling and referral services in increasing identification of HIV-positive individuals. A Systematic Review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 33(2 Suppl), S89-100.
2. Task Force On Community Prevention Services (2007). Recommendations to Increase Testing and Identification of HIV-Positive Individuals Through Partner Counseling and Referral Services. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 33(2 Suppl), S88.
3. CDC. Recommendations for Partner Services Programs for HIV Infection, Syphilis, Gonorrhea, and Chlamydial Infection. *MMWR* (2008); 57(No. RR-9). Available at www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5709a1.htm.
4. Skarbinski J, Rosenberg E, Paz-Bailey G, et al. Human immunodeficiency virus transmission at each step of the care continuum in the United States. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2015;175(4):588-596.

Resources

Additional Prevention IS Care materials

Additional information about Partner Services is available, along with a variety of other materials for HIV providers and their patients, at:

cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/pic



An online resource for patients

CDC offers a comprehensive website, HIV Treatment Works, designed to provide reliable information to patients at all stages of HIV infection. Focusing on getting in care, staying in care, and living well, your patients will also find insightful videos of real people sharing how they live well with HIV.

cdc.gov/hivtreatmentworks



Other resources to consider

- Partner Services overviews and patient education materials
cdc.gov/hiv/prevention/programs/pwp/partnerservices.html
- To locate a Comprehensive Risk Counseling Service program in your area, find your local health department at **healthfinder.gov** > **Organizations** > **State Agencies**
- HIV resources for providers who deliver care to people living with HIV
cdc.gov/actagainstaids/pic
- General information
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)



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