

Prenatal HIV Testing Discussion Guide Checklist

Patient Name:

This can be inserted in patient's
chart as informed consent

Healthcare providers in Ontario must offer HIV antibody testing to all pregnant women and those planning pregnancies. Since 1998, a universal Prenatal HIV Testing Program has been in place and about 80 per cent of pregnant women in Ontario are being tested for HIV. Increased uptake of HIV testing during pregnancy is required if all women are to access the benefits that come from testing. Healthcare providers have an important role to play in helping their patients understand the importance of HIV testing in relation to pregnancy.

It is strongly recommended that all women be offered HIV testing as part of routine prenatal care because many women who test positive may not appear to have risk factors other than unprotected sex with one partner. Prior testing does not rule out HIV. If ongoing risk is present, repeat testing during the pregnancy is recommended to identify women who may be seroconverting. Women may wish to include their partner in the discussion about HIV testing.

The HIV antibody test is voluntary and must only be done with informed consent.

This discussion guide and checklist will help you counsel your patients who are pregnant or considering pregnancy and can be added to the patient chart. Make sure she has the brochure, *HIV Testing Is Important For You And Your Baby*.

Points to Cover in Discussion

Offer HIV testing

HIV testing is recommended for all women in Ontario as part of routine prenatal care. The results are accurate and take about two weeks to return.

Recommend repeat testing and partner testing

- for women who may be seroconverting or with ongoing risk, repeat the testing
- women are often unaware of their partner's risk, present or past, therefore recommend the partner be tested also.

Testing is voluntary

It is the woman's decision to accept or decline the offer of the HIV test. If she declines, remind her she will continue to receive the same standard of care that you, the healthcare provider, offer to all pregnant women.

The benefits of testing

Testing for HIV in pregnancy is recommended because treatment is available that can improve the mother's health and prevent transmission to her baby.

The consequences of testing

A positive HIV test can affect a woman's relationships, her work, her ability to travel freely or emigrate, and her access to insurance and housing. If she is in the process of immigrating to Canada, this can also be affected.

Answer any questions and give her a brochure

Answer any questions about:

- what HIV/AIDS is
- how HIV/AIDS is transmitted
- how to prevent getting HIV/AIDS
- the test itself.

Ask for consent

Denied

A signed consent form is not needed but her decision must be documented. The HIV test can be done at the same time as other routine prenatal tests. The woman may prefer to take time to think further about the test and discuss it with others. Reiterate the offer of testing at subsequent appointments.

Discuss the results

If positive:

- see CMA's, *Counselling Guidelines for Human Immunodeficiency Virus Serologic Testing*, revised 1993
- review *Treatment Guide for Preventing Maternal HIV Transmission* included with positive test result
- evaluate need for referral for ongoing prenatal care.

If negative:

- emphasize prevention of HIV
- discuss any risks taken in the past three months, which may mean the result is not accurate and should be repeated in three months.

Additional Information

HIV is the virus that can lead to AIDS. It is passed from person to person through unprotected sex and sharing needles and other drug injection equipment. HIV can also be passed from mother to child during pregnancy, labour, delivery and breastfeeding. A woman may be infected with HIV and not know it, even if she has had only one sexual partner. There is no way to tell for sure whether someone is infected with HIV except by testing.

If a woman is infected with HIV, her baby has a 15 to 30 per cent chance of becoming infected. Treatments are available that can reduce the chance to one to two per cent.

Nominal Testing

If the woman is tested for HIV as part of her routine prenatal care using the prenatal requisition form, the test will be nominal, i.e., ordered using her name and her health card number.

Anonymous Testing

A woman can be tested at one of Ontario's anonymous HIV testing sites. In this case, only the woman receives the result of the test and no one, including her healthcare provider, will know her test results unless she decides to tell him or her. Excellent counselling is available through anonymous testing sites.

It's a woman's option to tell her healthcare provider the results of her anonymous test. It is the physician's option to document this. If a woman requests treatment for HIV, you should discuss retesting nominally to provide a documented positive HIV test result for her patient record.

New Ontario Studies on HIV Testing in Pregnancy Show...

- Women want more information on HIV testing than they are currently receiving. (Leonard, *Ontario's Prenatal HIV Testing Program: What Pregnant Women Have To Say*, Jan. 2001)

- Many women thought they were tested for HIV during their pregnancy but were not. (Leonard)
- Many women tested for HIV during pregnancy were not aware that they had a choice to take the HIV test. (Leonard)
- Testing rates are higher if:
 - testing is encouraged as a routine practice in prenatal care
 - healthcare providers consider HIV testing important regardless of perceived patient risk
 - healthcare providers feel they have adequate knowledge of HIV testing. (Guenter et al. *Prenatal HIV Screening in Ontario: Practices and Attitudes of Family Physicians, Obstetricians and Midwives*, Jan. 2001).

For Women Who Are Not Tested For HIV

In 1998 the Ministry of Health developed a Prenatal HIV Testing Program, recommending that healthcare providers discuss and offer HIV antibody testing to all pregnant women and those planning pregnancies.

Some leftover blood from other prenatal tests, which would normally be thrown away, may be used for research to determine the rate of HIV infection among women in Ontario. If so, all identifying information (e.g., name and health card number) will be permanently removed and the patient will not (and cannot) be given the results. If your patient chooses to opt out of the research study, check the appropriate box on the prenatal requisition.

For More Information Call:

Motherisk HIV Healthline at 1-888-246-5840 or the infectious disease specialist at your nearest hospital.

www.health.gov.on.ca www.HealthyOntario.com

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