

September 26, 2018

SUBJECT: HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and STBBI's

Dear Colleagues,

Sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs) including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Gonorrhoea remain an important public health issue in Canada and worldwide. The importance of testing, knowledge of status, and early diagnosis cannot be overemphasized.

Since January 2018, Public Health has received 16 new reports of HIV in the province, mostly from the Fredericton area. This represents approximately double the number of cases we expect to be reported in a full year. Many of these cases are people new to New Brunswick who have chronic infections. There have also been newly acquired infections with local exposures. Cases have been reported among new residents of New Brunswick, Men Who have Sex with Men (MSM).

HIV shares risk factors for transmission with other infections such as hepatitis B, syphilis and gonorrhoea. An outbreak of acute hepatitis B has been ongoing in the Moncton area among MSM since 2014, syphilis rates remained elevated after the 2010-2012 provincial outbreak and gonorrhoea incidence has been increasing since 2016. Infection with another sexually transmitted organism increases the susceptibility to and communicability of HIV. Therefore please:

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- **Counsel to reduce STBBI risk and offer HIV testing in routine medical care.** If you are considering one STBBI, screen for all relevant infections such as HIV, HBV, HCV, gonorrhoea, chlamydia and syphilis in accordance with the Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/sexual-health-sexually-transmitted-infections/canadian-guidelines/sexually-transmitted-infections/canadian-guidelines-sexually-transmitted-infections-19.html> and <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/hiv-aids/hiv-screening-testing-guide.html>
- **Urgently refer newly diagnosed cases of HIV** to an Infectious Disease Clinician. (Consider directly consulting with an Infectious Diseases physician by phone). You can order baseline laboratory work in newly acquired infections to expedite treatment. Early treatment results in better patient outcomes and reduces the risk of transmission. New HIV infection is associated with high viral loads.
- **Offer Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)** to those with high ongoing risk of HIV acquisition as in the Canadian Guideline on HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis and Nonoccupational Postexposure Prophylaxis: <http://www.cmaj.ca/content/189/47/E1448> PrEP reduces HIV acquisition risk by up to 96%. Here is a link to a free CME module on PrEP (1 Mainpro Credit; survey participation is not necessary): <http://bit.ly/2qkfuQM>





The NB Department of Health wishes to remind physicians that emtricitabine / tenofovir disoproxil fumarate tablets (Truvada® and generic brands) is now listed as a regular benefit in the NB Drug Plans Formulary. This medication is covered when prescribed for any indication, including the treatment of HIV infection, for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), for individuals covered by the NB public drug plans (special authorization is not required for any indication).

Daily use of PrEP is recommended by the World Health Organization as an effective method to prevent HIV in people at risk of infection. It is part of a suite of tools to prevent new HIV infections, including use of condoms and sterile drug use equipment, and other risk-reduction services and supports. People at risk include men and transwomen who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, and people who have sex with individuals living with HIV.

Individuals who do not have drug insurance or who have insurance that does not cover Truvada® and generic brands may obtain additional information on the New Brunswick Drug Plan by visiting the following webpage: www.gnb.ca/drugplan.

I would like to thank you for your continuous work and support on this important public health matter. It is vital to have programs based on promotion of responsible sexual behavior, early diagnosis and treatment in the prevention and control of STBBI's in New Brunswick.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jennifer Russell".

Dr. Jennifer Russell, BA, BSc, MD, CCFP
Chief Medical Officer of Health

