



State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
California Department of Public Health



GAVIN NEWSOM
Governor

TOMÁS J. ARAGÓN, M.D., Dr.P.H.
Director and State Public Health Officer

March 28, 2022

Dear Colleague,

Emergency departments (EDs) are uniquely positioned to identify people with syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis C who otherwise might remain undiagnosed. Among those who experience barriers accessing routine primary care, EDs often serve as the sole point of contact with the healthcare system. EDs act as a safety net for these individuals and offer an important opportunity to identify and treat these patients, as well as bridge the gap with public health, while providing immediate and essential medical care for people who are at highest risk for sexually transmitted diseases (STD), HIV, and hepatitis C.^{1, 2}

Syphilis and hepatitis C are curable, and HIV treatment can achieve viral suppression and undetectable viral loads, which eliminates sexual transmission of HIV.³ Identification and treatment of these infections decreases statewide morbidity and mortality. Therefore, **California Department of Public Health (CDPH) recommends that EDs consider implementing routine opt-out testing for syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis C.**

Opt-out testing – in which a patient is notified that testing will be performed unless the patient declines (e.g., if blood testing is being done as part of the planned workup) – is recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as best clinical care, regardless of reported risk behaviors. **Implementation of opt-out STD, HIV, and hepatitis C testing is supported by California state law and health department recommendations.**^{2, 4}

Identification and immediate treatment through the ED may have the added benefit of furthering health equity for those disproportionately affected by these infections.⁵ Routinized opt-out ED syphilis, HIV, and hepatitis C screening is an effective strategy to identify infections, begin immediate treatment, link to care, prevent transmission, and enable health equity.

If you have questions, please contact stdcb@cdph.ca.gov. Thank you for your work to improve the health and wellness of California’s residents.

Sincerely,

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Additional Resources:

CDPH Screening for Syphilis in Emergency Departments – Resource Guide:

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Screening-for-Syphilis-in-Emergency-Departments-Resource-Guide.pdf>

CDPH HIV Testing in Hospital Emergency Departments: Findings and Recommendations:

https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/CDPH%20Document%20Library/AB_2439_Report.ADA.pdf

CDC Hepatitis C Screening Resources for Health Care Providers:

<https://www.cdc.gov/knowmorehepatitis/hcp/index.htm>

References:

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Trends in the Utilization of Emergency Department Services, 2009-2018*. Available at: https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated_legacy_files//199046/ED-report-to-Congress.pdf
2. California Department of Public Health. *HIV Testing in Hospital Emergency Departments: Findings and Recommendations Assembly Bill No. 2439*. Available at: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/CDPH%20Document%20Library/AB_2439_Report.ADA.pdf
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *HIV Treatment as Prevention*. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/art/index.html>
4. California Department of Public Health. *Summary of Laws and Regulations Related to Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) Prevention and Control in California*. Available at: https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Summary_of_STD_Laws.pdf
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *HIV Prevention Progress Report, 2019*. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/policies/progressreports/cdc-hiv-preventionprogressreport.pdf>