

Theme statement

European Testing Week 2024

The role of healthcare providers in increasing testing for HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections, and ensuring linkage to care

The number of people living with viral hepatitis, HIV and STIs, who are undiagnosed or diagnosed at a late stage remains unacceptable. In the WHO European region, nearly 17% of people living with HIV remain undiagnosed¹, and 51% are diagnosed late with HIV². 71% of people with HCV and 84% of people with HBV are undiagnosed³. STI cases are on the rise in Europe⁴. These figures signal that testing programmes are not sufficiently effective and need to be improved. This has serious consequences for people's health outcomes, for the risk of onwards transmission, and for healthcare costs related to treating complications from untreated infections.

Efforts to increase testing for HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs are needed to ensure better treatment and prevention coverage and to reach the global health targets: 95 % of people living with HIV and 90% of people with HBV and HCV being aware of their status by 2030.

Healthcare providers can play an essential role in contributing to reach these targets by providing increased and integrated testing and treatment for HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs. But how can healthcare providers be guided and supported in becoming "testing champions"?

Stigma related to these infections, and to key populations most affected by these infections, acts as a major barrier to testing. Firstly, it deters people from seeking testing for fear of being stigmatised, and secondly it causes reluctance and discomfort in healthcare providers to offer testing. Testing is often offered based on healthcare providers' perception of the patient's risk. A recent survey on HIV-related stigma in healthcare settings, carried out by ECDC and EACS, found that a substantial

¹ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/hiv-dublin-continuum-care-progress-report-2023.pdf>

² https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/HIV-AIDS_surveillance_in_Europe_2023_%28_2022_data_%29_0.pdf

³ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240091672>

⁴ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events/sti-cases-rise-across-europe>

proportion of healthcare workers harboured reservations about providing care to certain key populations at high risk of HIV infection. The survey also documented gaps in HIV-related knowledge leading to stigma, lack of awareness of – or adherence to – anti-discrimination policies, and the urgent need for targeted interventions to reduce stigma and discrimination.

The ECDC guidance on integrated testing for HIV and viral hepatitis testing⁵ outlines the following recommendations for testing in healthcare settings:

- Routinely offer a test for HIV to all persons who present with an HIV indicator condition⁶ or certain symptoms that could be related to HIV (see the list of HIV Indicator Conditions in Annex 5 [here](#)).
- Offer integrated testing for HIV, hepatitis and STI in sexual health clinics, general practices, hospitals, emergency settings, prison settings, and drug treatment centres.
- Consider adopting integrated screening for these infections as routine care in areas of intermediate or high prevalence and to certain groups at higher risk of infection, as outlined in the guidance.

Additional testing recommendations to healthcare providers:

- Suggest a test. Don't wait for people to ask to get tested. Most people accept being tested when suggested by their healthcare provider.
- Opportunistic testing (offering a test to a patient who is already undergoing venepuncture for another reason) can be done at a relatively low cost and is a cost-effective strategy.
- Provide testing options adjusted to the needs and preferences of your client.
- Improve both access (where testing is offered) and uptake of testing (how testing is offered).
- Create enabling environments (without stigma and judgment, and without legal barriers for testing)
- Facilitate easy access for all (consider schedules, location, use of peers, environment).
- Ensure that testing is voluntary, confidential, and non-stigmatising.
- Promote and support partner notification when people test positive.

⁵ https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/hiv-hep-testing-guidance_0.pdf

⁶ An HIV indicator condition is where the undiagnosed HIV prevalence of those presenting with the condition is at least 0.1%.

We encourage healthcare providers to sign up for European Testing Week and participate, as a way to increase awareness and signal that testing is available in your setting.

- Download and print the flyer [“Most people accept an HIV and hepatitis test when suggested by their healthcare provider”](#) from our website and put up in the waiting area.
- Refer people to the European Test Finder, so people can easily find the nearest place where they can get tested for HIV, hepatitis and STIs. Contact us (eurotest.rigshospitalet@regionh.dk) if you are interested in promotion materials about the Test Finder that can be printed and put up on the wall.

What is European Testing Week?

[European Testing Week](#) (ETW) is a biannual campaign which takes place in May and November every year with the aim to increase early diagnosis of HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs. Since its start, more than [700 different organisations](#) and institutions have participated in the campaign. During the campaign week, community-based organizations, healthcare facilities, policy institutions and educational facilities and others organize various local activities to raise awareness and increase access to testing.

[Sign up](#) now to participate and support efforts to achieve the targets for HIV and viral hepatitis!

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Test.Treat.Prevent.