
Partner Services

An Outline
for the
Health Care
Professional



ACT
against
AIDS

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

20%

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

What is Partner Services?

Partner Services provides an array of free services to persons with HIV or other 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 reductions in risky sex 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 reducing risky transmission behaviors.

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 above.

For Patients *Living with HIV*

- For patients who present with an STD or inform you of risky behavior, consider the following:
 - Make patient aware that he or she may be contacted by someone from the health department.
 - Discuss strategies to reduce risky 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.

Patient-Oriented Material

There is also a patient brochure, which is designed to educate your patients on Partner Services. This brochure is FREE, and ordering information is located at the back of this piece.

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.

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.

Best Practice:

When the Health Department Informs Partners

When health departments take responsibility for notification, more partners are successfully notified of their exposure.¹ 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.

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 25% of those infected with HIV in the United States are not aware of their infection and that this group is responsible for approximately 54%–70% of new infections.²
- 20% of the partners tested by Partner Services programs tested positive for HIV and were previously undiagnosed.³
- 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.

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 > Find Services Near You > State Health & Human Services.

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 risky 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 reducing risky transmission 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 risk-reduction counseling and interventions.

Resources for You

- To order additional FREE physician or patient-oriented Partner Services materials, go to www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/partners/Partner-Services.html or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).
- For more information on initiating brief transmission prevention discussions with your HIV-positive patients, visit www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/hssc where you can order FREE materials for both you and your patients. You can also receive these materials by calling 800-232-4636.
- To locate a Comprehensive Risk Counseling Service program in your area, contact your health department. To find your local health department, go to www.healthfinder.gov > Find Services Near You > State Health & Human Services.
- Visit the American Academy of HIV Medicine's website, www.aahivm.org, for provider resources, such as the robust Referral Link database and a free copy of *A Review of Best Practices in HIV Testing and Linkage to Care*.

References

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3. Marks, G., Crepaz, N., & Janssen, R. S. (2006). Estimating sexual transmission of HIV from persons aware and unaware that they are infected with the virus in the USA. *AIDS*, 20(10), 1447-1450.
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