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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health  
Office of the Provincial Health Officer

### **New HIV/AIDS testing guidelines for all B.C. adults released**

VICTORIA – Provincial health officer Dr. Perry Kendall has released new HIV testing guidelines for health-care providers in B.C. to encourage all British Columbian adults to get tested.

The guidelines - the first of their kind in Canada - build on B.C.'s aggressive fight against HIV/AIDS and recommend that HIV testing be part of the regular tests offered to adult patients. This will help more British Columbians infected with HIV be diagnosed earlier and get them the life-saving treatment they need.

“British Columbia’s reputation as a global leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS is growing because of the development of innovative programs and guidelines like these,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “Dr. Kendall’s guidelines will help remove the stigma some associate with HIV as B.C. continues to set a standard for care and treatment of this disease.”

At present, only pregnant women are routinely offered HIV testing – a program that has virtually eliminated HIV transmission from mother to child in British Columbia.

The new HIV testing guidelines recommend that practitioners offer an HIV test:

- Routinely, every five years, for all patients aged 18 to 70 years.
- Routinely, every year, for all patients aged 18 – 70 who belong to populations with a higher burden of HIV infections.
- Once at age 70 or older if the patients’ HIV status is not known.

And, offer an HIV test to patients including adults 18 – 70, youth and the elderly, whenever:

- They present with a new or worsening medical condition that warrants laboratory investigation.
- They present with symptoms of HIV infection or advanced HIV disease.
- They or their providers identify a risk for HIV acquisition.
- They request an HIV test.
- They are pregnant.

“The new guidelines are similar to recommendations made by expert bodies in the USA, U.K. and France,” said Dr. Kendall. “They are evidence-based and were written by an expert panel of B.C. doctors from a number of clinical specialties.”

With new advances in therapy, HIV-positive patients receiving treatment can expect to live long, healthy lives free of symptoms. According to a recent survey published in the British Medical Journal, early diagnosis of those with the disease and on antiretroviral therapy can live as long as those without HIV. In addition, treatment can greatly reduce the likelihood of HIV

transmission and move the world towards an “AIDS-free generation”.

Despite these advances, many individuals with HIV are not diagnosed early – and late diagnosis can make treatment more difficult, allowing the disease to have more opportunity to spread.

“The four-year STOP HIV/AIDS program has provided an excellent opportunity to pilot and evaluate expanded HIV testing in our health care system,” said medical health officer for Vancouver Coastal Health Dr. Réka Gustafson. “These new HIV testing guidelines have been developed in close collaboration with family physicians, the BC Centre for Disease Control and with laboratory and public health specialists. They provide an excellent guide for health care providers to identify HIV infected patients and get them the help they need.”

"In addition to highlighting the need for routine offers of HIV testing, these guidelines also offer important recommendations for populations with a higher burden of HIV infection to ensure that individuals are both supported for prevention activities and rapid engagement in care," said medical director of the BC Centre for Disease Control Dr. Gina Ogilvie.

“This is an important step in our collective effort to reduce HIV in British Columbia and around the world,” said director of the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, Dr. Julio Montaner. “By making HIV testing more accessible, we will be better able to find and offer treatment to those in need. The Treatment as Prevention approach works best when we diagnose and treat HIV infection as early as possible.”

British Columbia is a recognized leader in the global fight against HIV/AIDS, with the development of programs such as Seek and Treat for Optimal Prevention of HIV/AIDS (STOP HIV/AIDS). These programs have expanded HIV testing, identifying more people infected with the disease and enabling them to get proper, life-saving treatment.

**Learn More:**

The HIV testing guidelines can be found at: [www.hivguide.ca](http://www.hivguide.ca)

HIV Testing privacy information can be found at: [http://www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/C0486576-7398-4630-B71C-31A0D5EAEBDC/0/STI\\_HIV\\_PrePost\\_Guidelines\\_20110923.pdf](http://www.bccdc.ca/NR/rdonlyres/C0486576-7398-4630-B71C-31A0D5EAEBDC/0/STI_HIV_PrePost_Guidelines_20110923.pdf)

Letter in the BC Medical Journal at: <http://bcmj.org/bc-centre-disease-control/new-hiv-testing-guidelines-bc>

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