

July 24, 2014

Dear Colleague:

In a recent letter, I brought to your attention Governor Cuomo's announcement of a three-pronged plan to end the AIDS epidemic in New York (<http://www.governor.ny.gov/press/06292014-end-aids-epidemic>). This letter will outline the role that pre-exposure prophylaxis (one of the three components of the Governor's plan) can play in our efforts to prevent new cases of HIV.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is an evidence-based, biomedical intervention with proven efficacy to prevent HIV infection among individuals at highest risk for HIV. Based on the results of several large scale trials, and a growing body of experience in clinical practice, PrEP is a safe and critical resource in our HIV prevention toolbox. **The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) AIDS Institute urges clinical providers and prevention programs to view PrEP as a first line intervention for: men who have sex with men and trans-women who engage in on-going, condomless anal intercourse; HIV negative partners in a sero-discordant couple; and high risk heterosexual women in areas of elevated seroprevalence. A complete list of persons who may benefit from PrEP is included in the NYSDOH PrEP Guidance Document available at www.hivguidelines.org**

Thirty years into the epidemic, it is critical that we build upon our history of successes fighting HIV/AIDS. PrEP bears a striking resemblance to two other initiatives which have dramatically turned the tide on the HIV/AIDS epidemic. NYS has virtually eliminated mother to child transmission of HIV through our efforts to ensure access to antiretroviral medication for HIV positive pregnant women and their newborns. Implementation of this biomedical intervention, which employs the same principles as PrEP, resulted in reducing cases of mother to child transmission of HIV from an estimated 475 infants infected in 1990 to only 3 cases in 2012. When NYS began authorizing syringe exchange programs in 1992, there was concern about the message this would send to drug users. Rather than encouraging drug use, syringe exchange has proven to be a powerful tool for HIV prevention that has transformed NYS's HIV epidemic. In 1992, sharing injection drug use accounted for 50% of new cases of HIV, while most recent epidemiological data from 2012 indicate that injection drug use accounted for less than 4% of new cases of HIV. PrEP, as a form of harm reduction, is a potential "game changer" of the same magnitude as expanding access to sterile syringes.

PrEP is a six prong intervention for people who are HIV negative, that includes: 1) taking one pill once a day; 2) periodic HIV testing; 3) counseling about the use of condoms to prevent STDs; 4) education about harm reduction options; 5) STD screening; and, 6) counseling to promote adherence to the once a day PrEP medication. NYS Medicaid, along with most insurance plans, will cover the only currently FDA approved PrEP medication, Truvada®. Uninsured patients may receive Truvada® through the Gilead patient assistance program. (<https://start.truvada.com/>)

Successful widespread implementation of PrEP requires collaboration between clinical providers, HIV testing programs, primary prevention programs and support services providers. The AIDS Institute urges our funded programs, along with clinical providers and community leadership, to work together to expand access to PrEP. Below is a list of steps that can be taken to maximize integration of PrEP into our comprehensive HIV prevention efforts in NYS:

- Clinical providers should begin prescribing PrEP to patients who would benefit from the intervention;
- HIV testing and prevention programs should educate clients about PrEP and make appropriate referrals to clinical providers;
- Support services providers who serve individuals and communities at high risk for HIV should begin referring clients for PrEP as part of their efforts to link these individuals to health care services; and,
- A wide range of support services providers in clinical and community settings should partner with clinical providers to support medication adherence for those taking PrEP.

In an effort to increase access to PrEP, the NYSDOH is compiling a directory of providers that prescribe PrEP. An on-line survey is now available to gather information from clinical providers who would like to be included in the directory. To ensure that the directory is complete, the survey also allows other interested responsible persons to submit names of clinical sites that they are aware of that prescribe PrEP. The NYSDOH will contact any site that is not self-nominated before including the site in the directory. **Click on the link below to register a clinic for the PrEP Voluntary Provider Directory:** <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/S329ZK5>

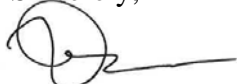
The NYSDOH is making multiple resources available to educate clinical and non-clinical providers about PrEP. Information about how to access educational program are outlined below:

Clinical providers will find resources regarding PrEP on the Clinical Education Initiative website at www.ceitraining.org	Prevention and support services providers can access training resources on PrEP at www.hivtrainingny.org
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In addition, the NYSDOH has dedicated the following web page as a portal for information about PrEP: <http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/general/prep/>. You will find a Q&A document, links to important resources, consumer education materials and the PrEP Voluntary Provider Directory mentioned above. **Please check this web page periodically to find the latest resources.**

In collaboration with community leadership, the Governor and the NYSDOH have established an ambitious plan to reduce rates of new infections to sub-epidemic levels by the year 2020. PrEP is one of the proven interventions that, if we are to reach this goal, will need to be readily available in communities across New York State. Please join the AIDS Institute in our efforts to employ this important prevention intervention to bend the curve on the HIV epidemic. If you would like additional information about PrEP and the AIDS Institute's efforts, please contact the Office of the Medical Director at 518-473-8815 or email prep@health.state.ny.us.

Sincerely,



Dan O'Connell
Director
AIDS Institute