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# STD/HIV PARTNER SERVICES

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### *What are Partner Services?*

Partner Services are safe, evidence-based, effective public health interventions that assist people with HIV infection or an STD in telling their sexual and needle sharing partner(s) about possible disease exposure to facilitate testing and referral to treatment. Partner Services are **voluntary and confidential**. Follow-up with their partners is conducted without disclosing any identifying information about the individual believed to be infected or the physician making the report.

### *Why is it important?*

Studies have shown that **20%** of partners tested through HIV Partner Services programs are identified as **new HIV positive cases**.<sup>70</sup> Informing previous partners of people testing positive for HIV and STD is both a personal responsibility of the patient and a public health responsibility.

### *How can providers help?*

Medical providers and other healthcare professionals have a key role in this process. It is the role of the provider to **motivate their patient** to engage in this valuable public health intervention. The CDC **strongly recommends** that all persons with newly diagnosed or reported HIV infection or early syphilis receive partner services with active health department involvement. In certain instances, some local health jurisdictions are also initiating partner services with high priority GC cases.<sup>71</sup> Trained staff at your local health department are available to assist you and your patients by providing voluntary and confidential partner services to patients infected with HIV or other STDs.

### *How do providers access partner services?*

We recommend contacting your local health department STD and/or HIV program to speak to the partner services specialist staff directly. In some cases, the partner services staff can meet the patient at your clinic when they return for results to provide STD or HIV Partner Services. Communicate with your local health department staff to develop the best strategy for referral of your patients to partner services.

### *How does it work?*

A local health department partner services specialist can assist STD and HIV positive patients with informing their sexual and/or needle sharing partners about possible exposure to STD/HIV.

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<sup>70</sup> Hogben, et al. Am J Prev Med. 2007 Aug;33(2 Suppl):S89-100.

<sup>71</sup> MMWR 2008;57(No. RR-9), [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5709.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr5709.pdf)

**What happens:**

Health department staff engage the original patient in a counseling session in a private and confidential setting.

- Information is provided regarding current infection(s) and other STDs.
- Recent sexual and needle sharing behaviors and places where patients meet partners are discussed. Personal identifying and contact information is elicited for all relevant partners.
- Client-centered counseling is used to develop risk reduction plans to reduce the likelihood of acquiring future STDs.
- Referrals to additional medical or social services are provided.

AND

Health department staff follow-up with the patient's sexual and/or needle sharing partners<sup>72</sup>

- Locatable partners are confidentially contacted by phone, email or in person to inform them that they may have been exposed to HIV and/or an STD.
- No names or identifiers are ever revealed to maintain the anonymity and privacy of the original patient.
- Partners are referred for relevant testing and treatment services. Linkage to HIV care services are provided, as necessary.
- If appropriate, referrals to substance use and mental health programs are offered.

**How does Partner Services benefit clinicians and patients?**

Benefits to Patients and Partners	Benefits to Clinicians
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prevents STD or HIV-infected patient from having to reveal presence of STD or HIV status</li><li>• Fulfills ethical desires for the patient</li><li>• Provides information about real risk of HIV or STD infection to partners</li><li>• Provides an opportunity to prevent new infections (e.g., treatment during incubation for STD)</li><li>• Provides an opportunity to learn status and link to care, for those who may be infected and not know it</li><li>• Links patients to other services</li><li>• Intervenes in the spread of STDs or HIV to other partners or unborn children</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fulfills public health and ethical concerns</li><li>• Improves patient outcomes, particularly among HIV-infected patients</li><li>• Provides ongoing health department support to meet legal obligations</li></ul>

<sup>72</sup> California Health and Safety Code 120555, available via [www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/std/Documents/CDPH-STD-Regulations-Digest.pdf](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/std/Documents/CDPH-STD-Regulations-Digest.pdf)