Dear Colleague:

In 2017, nearly 2.3 million cases of chlamydia (CT), gonorrhea (GC), and syphilis were diagnosed in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this exceeded the 2016 record by over 200,000 cases and marked a fourth year of sharp increases in these sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). To effectively detect and treat disease, it is critical that routine STD screening includes all exposed anatomical sites.¹

For men who have sex with men (MSM), CDC recommends screening for urethral/urinary and rectal GC and CT, and pharyngeal² GC (as indicated by exposure) with nucleic acid amplification testing (NAAT). Of note, the rectum and pharynx are the most common sites of GC and CT infections among MSM. These infections are usually asymptomatic and typically occur without a coinciding urethral infection.¹,² When urine-only screening is performed, up to 90% of rectal GC and 77% of rectal CT infections remain undetected and untreated, thus highlighting the importance of extragenital testing in MSM.³

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) recommends the following:³

- Sexually active people living with HIV – regardless of gender – should receive at least annual GC/CT² screening at all exposed sites.⁴

- HIV-negative MSM not using HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) should receive at least annual STD screening at all exposed sites.

- MSM using HIV PrEP should receive quarterly STD screening at all exposed sites.

In addition to provider-collected specimens, patient self-collected swabs are both accurate and acceptable among patients.⁵,⁶,⁷ Having patients collect their own specimens could overcome potential barriers to screening such as time constraints and patient/provider communication and discomfort, which might limit provider collection of specimens from extragenital sites.⁸ Standing orders for routine STD screening may further streamline collection for rectal and pharyngeal specimens. The California Prevention Training Center (CAPTC) can assist in implementing routine rectal and pharyngeal STD screening.

¹ Comprehensive screening for STDs should also include serologic tests for syphilis among others as indicated. Please review the California STD Screening Recommendations.

² Testing for oropharyngeal chlamydia is not routinely recommended because its prevalence is generally low.

³ More frequent screening may be appropriate depending on individual risk and local epidemiology.
The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has recently approved two assays that can accurately detect GC/CT through testing of rectal and pharyngeal specimens: the Aptima Combo 2 Assay (Hologic, Marlborough, MA) and the Xpert CT/NG (Cepheid, Sunnyvale, CA). These NAAT assays are the first GC/CT testing devices cleared for this purpose. Other GC/CT assays, which have not yet been FDA-approved for rectal and pharyngeal specimens, are sometimes used for extragenital STD testing by labs that have validated their use. If your site uses such an assay, please consult the laboratory director for further guidance with regards to securing approval of processing this test for rectal and/or pharyngeal specimens.

Prior to FDA approval, three large commercial laboratories in California had validated and accepted GC/CT NAAT assays for use on rectal and pharyngeal specimens: LabCorp, Quest Diagnostics, and Center for Disease Detection. Due to prior validation, these labs already have company-specific ordering codes in place for this purpose, shown below.

**Company-specific ordering codes for two widely used laboratories are listed below:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Combined GC/CT NAAT Tests</th>
<th>CT test only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LabCorp</td>
<td>Quest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECTAL</td>
<td>188672</td>
<td>16506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHARYNGEAL</td>
<td>188698</td>
<td>70051</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) billing codes:**
CT detection by NAAT: 87491; GC detection by NAAT: 87591.

NAAT screening for rectal GC/CT and pharyngeal GC is effective at detecting asymptomatic infections and allows for adequate treatment. Appropriate management, in turn, cures disease, interrupts transmission, and decreases the risk of HIV infection among HIV-negative MSM. CDPH strongly recommends you include routine rectal and pharyngeal STD screening in your practice.

Thank you for your work to improve the sexual health of your patients.

Sincerely,

Eric C. Tang, MD, MPH
Public Health Medical Officer
Sexually Transmitted Diseases Control Branch
California Department of Public Health

Philip J. Peters, MD
Public Health Medical Officer
Office of AIDS
California Department of Public Health

---

iv Letter updated 7/10/19 to reflect new FDA approval of two tests
v Company and laboratory names are provided for informational purposes only. California Department of Public Health does not endorse any company or its products.
vi CPT copyright 2008 American Medical Association. All rights reserved.
**Additional Resources (Please click on a resource to be directed to the webpage)**

- **CDPH STD Screening Recommendations**
  [www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/CA_STD-Screening-Recs.pdf](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/CA_STD-Screening-Recs.pdf)
  California Department of Public Health STD screening recommendations, including recommendations for MSM and HIV positive men

- **CDC 2015 STD Treatment Guidelines**
  The Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2015 STD Treatment Guidelines, including guidelines for testing and treatment of rectal gonorrhea and chlamydia

- **National Coalition for STD Directors**
  [www.ncsddc.org/resource/extragenital](http://www.ncsddc.org/resource/extragenital)
  Resources for providers and laboratories pertaining to extragenital STD testing

- **California Prevention Training Center**
  [www.californiaptc.com](http://www.californiaptc.com)
  Assistance with developing protocols, validation studies, and teaching material related to self-collected specimens

- **STD Clinical Consultation Network**
  [www.stdccn.org](http://www.stdccn.org)
  Online consultation for questions about the evaluation and management of STD cases

- **National STD Curriculum**
  [www.std.uw.edu](http://www.std.uw.edu)
  National Network of STD Prevention Training Centers (NNPTC)’s free online STD curriculum and question bank. Offers continuing medical education credits.

- **Telephone HIV Consultation hotlines:**
  HIV/AIDS management: 800-933-3413
  PrEP phone consultation: 855-448-7737
  PEP phone consultation: 888-448-4911


