PRESS RELEASE

New NICE guidance to increase HIV testing in men who have sex with men

New NICE guidance aims to increase HIV testing to help reduce undiagnosed infection and prevent transmission among men who have sex with men by recommending healthcare professionals offer regular, routine testing to all men in high prevalence areas.

In 2009 in the UK, there were 6,630 people diagnosed with HIV. Over 40% of these new diagnoses are among men who have sex with men. There are approximately 30,800 men who have sex with men living with HIV in the UK and of these it is estimated that nearly 9,000 are unaware that they are infected.

HIV is no longer the ‘death sentence’ it once was, it can be successfully managed with antiretroviral therapies. However, if someone is diagnosed late it’s more likely that the virus will have already seriously damaged their immune system. Late diagnosis is one of the biggest contributing factors to illness and death for people with HIV. Almost a third of people in the UK who are diagnosed as HIV positive are diagnosed late.

Professor Mike Kelly, Director of the Centre for Public Health Excellence at NICE said: “HIV is still a serious problem in this country, with a large proportion of people unaware they are infected. This new guidance from NICE makes a number of practical recommendations which aim to increase HIV testing by encouraging

1 Health Protection Agency 2010
2 Late diagnosis is defined as taking place after antiretroviral treatment would typically have begun, or when the person has an AIDS-defining illness.
healthcare professionals to offer it routinely to people in areas where there are a high number of people living with HIV.

“For the individual, there are obvious health benefits to being diagnosed quickly - they can start treatment if they need to and look after their own health, but HIV testing and treatment can also help reduce transmission of the virus.”

Recommendations include:

- **Promoting HIV testing among men who have sex with men**
  - Ensure interventions to increase the uptake of HIV testing are hosted by, or advertised at, venues that encourage or facilitate sex between men. This is in addition to general, community-based HIV health promotion (for example, locations such as bars could be involved, as well as GP practices).

- **Primary and secondary care: offering and recommending an HIV test**
  - Primary care providers should offer and recommend HIV testing to all men who have not previously been diagnosed HIV positive and who fit into one of the following categories (full list available below*): registered with a practice in an area with a large community of men who have sex with men, or registered with a practice in an area with a high HIV prevalence (more than two diagnosed cases per 1000 people), or disclose that they have sex with other men.
  - Secondary and emergency care providers should offer and recommend HIV testing to all men admitted to hospital who have previously tested negative for HIV, or have never been tested, and who: are admitted in areas with a high prevalence of HIV, or disclose that they have sex with other men, or have symptoms that may indicate HIV or HIV is part of the differential diagnosis.

- **Outreach: providing rapid point-of-care tests**
  - Offer tests via outreach in venues where there is high-risk sexual behaviour or in venues sited in areas where there is high local prevalence of HIV. This could include community or voluntary sector premises, public sex environments (such as saunas or cruising areas) or other venues identified
during the planning exercise. Tests should be undertaken in a secluded or private area, in line with British HIV Association guidelines³.

Dr Matt Kearney General Practitioner, Runcorn; Primary Care Adviser, Department of Health:

Professor Jane Anderson Consultant Physician, Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust; Chair Elect, British HIV Association:

Scott Ellis Health promotion specialist in sexual health and HIV and lecturer in sexual health at University of East London:

Dr Keith Radcliffe, President of the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV:

“The later people are diagnosed with HIV, the more difficult and expensive it is to treat them, the poorer their outcome may be, and the more likely they are to have transmitted the infection. With an estimated 9,000 men who have sex with men unaware that they are HIV positive, we are delighted that this guidance, which is based on an overwhelming body of evidence, demonstrates the urgent need to move away from targeted testing, to a system of routine testing for all those at risk of contracting HIV, and we hope that all local health authorities, and all healthcare professionals work hard in implementing this guidance.”

Ends

For more information call the NICE press office on 0845 003 7782 or 07775 583 813.

Notes to Editors

About the guidance

1. The draft guidance is available on the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/guidance/PH34) from 23 March, 2011.

2. Men who have sex with men are disproportionately infected with HIV in England which is why the Department of Health asked NICE to produce guidance on how to increase the uptake of testing in this population.

3. This is one of two pieces of complementary NICE guidance on how to increase the uptake of HIV testing. The other guidance focuses on black African communities living in England and is available from the NICE website (www.nice.org.uk/guidance/PH33). People with an interest in increasing the uptake of HIV testing among both groups should refer to both pieces of guidance.

4. * Primary care providers should offer and recommend HIV testing to all men who have not previously been diagnosed HIV positive and who:

- register with a practice in an area with a large community of men who have sex with men, or
- register with a practice in an area with a high HIV prevalence (high prevalence means more than two diagnosed cases per 1000 people), or
- disclose that they have sex with other men, or
- are known to have sex with men and have not had a HIV test in the previous year, or
- are known to have sex with men and disclose that they have changed sexual partner or disclose high risk sexual practices, or
- have symptoms that may indicate HIV or HIV is part of the differential diagnosis (see national guidelines\(^4\) for HIV indicator diseases), or
- are diagnosed with, or request screening for, a sexually transmitted infection, or
- live in a high prevalence area and are undergoing blood tests for another reason.

The BHIVA guidelines also state that an HIV test should be offered to patients attending genitor-urinary medicine or sexual health clinics, antenatal services, termination of pregnancy services, drug dependency programmes, and services for tuberculosis, hepatitis B and C, and lymphoma.

In areas where more than 2 in 1000 people have been diagnosed with HIV, the BHIVA guidelines recommend that professionals should consider offering and recommending an HIV test when registering and admitting new patients.

**About NICE**

5. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance and standards on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health

6. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:

- **public health** – guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention of ill health for those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public and voluntary sector
- **health technologies** – guidance on the use of new and existing medicines, treatments, medical technologies (including devices and diagnostics) and procedures within the NHS
- **clinical practice** – guidance on the appropriate treatment and care of people with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS.

7. NICE produces standards for patient care:

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• **quality standards** – these reflect the very best in high quality patient care, to help healthcare practitioners and commissioners of care deliver excellent services

• **Quality and Outcomes Framework** – NICE develops the clinical and health improvement indicators in the QOF, the Department of Health scheme which rewards GPs for how well they care for patients

8. NICE provides advice and support on putting NICE guidance and standards into practice through its implementation programme, and it collates and accredits high quality health guidance, research and information to help health professionals deliver the best patient care through NHS Evidence.