

HEALTH ADVISORY



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

REGION IV PUBLIC HEALTH

Clark, Cowlitz, Skamania, Wahkiakum
counties and Cowlitz Tribe

To: Physicians and other health care providers

**Please distribute a copy of this information to each provider
in your organization.**

Questions regarding this information may be directed to the following Region IV health officers:

Alan Melnick, MD, MPH, CPH

Clark County Public Health, (360) 397-8412

Skamania County Community Health, (509) 427-3850

Cowlitz County Health & Human Services, (360) 414-5599

Wahkiakum County Health & Human Services, (360) 795-6207

Teresa Everson, MD, MPH

Clark County Public Health, (360) 397-8412

Skamania County Community Health, (509) 427-3850

Alert categories:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.

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Summary

An increase in newly diagnosed HIV infections among people who inject drugs in King County, Wash. has prompted the Washington State Department of Health and Region IV Public Health officers to issue an advisory requesting that health care providers increase their HIV testing among patients reporting current or recent injection drug use. Early detection and treatment of acute HIV infection is essential to safeguard the health of people living with HIV and reduce forward transmission.

Requested action

Washington State Department of Health and Region IV health officers request health care providers take the following actions:

Assess and evaluate patients for HIV risk factors:

- Elicit behavioral risk history including injection drug use, transactional sex, methamphetamine use, unstable housing/homelessness. [Click this link](#) for information on taking a comprehensive sexual history, which can be adapted for taking a drug use history.
- Asymptomatic people who inject drugs should be tested for HIV, hepatitis C, and syphilis at least annually. For current national recommendations for [routine HIV](#) and [hepatitis C](#) testing, click the links. For information on increases in syphilis among people who inject drugs, [click here](#).
- All people who inject drugs who present with symptoms consistent with acute HIV infection (e.g., fever, fatigue, myalgia, headache, pharyngitis, adenopathy) should be tested for HIV.

Promptly report new cases of HIV infection to your local health department.

Provide as much risk history, clinical, and demographic data (including complete contact information for the patient) as you can obtain. In Clark County, call 564.397.8082 to report a new case of HIV infection. To report a new case of HIV infection in Cowlitz, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties, [visit this link](#).

Link all people recently diagnosed or living with untreated HIV to care for full evaluation, follow up, and prompt initiation of antiretroviral therapy.

Focused efforts should be made to optimize treatment adherence and retain patients in care. The Washington State Department of Health and Clark County Public Health provide services to help people at risk for HIV and people living with HIV access medication, medical care, and support to improve their health. In Clark County, call 564.397.8082 for more information. In Cowlitz, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties, call 877.376.9316 or [visit this link](#).

Offer HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to people who inject drugs, and recommend PrEP initiation to people who inject drugs who exchange sex.

For information on PrEP in Washington state, [visit this link](#).

If needed, request support for HIV partner notification and linkage to support services and insurance.

In Clark County, call 564.397.8082. In Cowlitz, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties, call the Washington State Department of Health’s Office of Infectious Disease at 360.236.3425 or [visit this link](#) to be referred to a field service consultant serving your region.

Provide people who inject drugs with information about where to access sterile injection equipment.

For a current listing of syringe service programs in Washington State, [click here](#). [Clark County Public Health](#) and [Cowlitz Family Health Center](#) provide services in their respective counties.

Provide information about substance use treatment programs, including information about availability of medication assisted therapies, to patients interested in reducing or ceasing drug use.

For a current listing of substance use treatment programs in Washington State, visit the [WA Recovery Helpline](#).

Educate people who inject drugs about the availability of naloxone to prevent overdose death.

Opioid overdose death is preventable with naloxone. Visit [this link](#) for more information about naloxone, including where people can access it.

Background

Between 2017 and 2018, the number of new HIV diagnoses among heterosexuals who inject drugs in King County, Wash. increased from seven to 30 cases – a 328 percent increase. This ongoing increase in newly diagnosed HIV infections appears similar to outbreaks of HIV among people who inject drugs that have been identified in both urban and rural areas elsewhere in the United States. A recent similar increase in cases among heterosexuals who inject drugs in Snohomish County raises concerns about the potential for another cluster in Washington state.

To date, the Washington State Department of Health has not observed a similar increase in HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs in other regions of the state. However, based on surveillance and analysis of the risk environment, identification of additional cases is expected, and the Washington State Department of Health is concerned that areas outside of King County are vulnerable to increases in HIV transmission among people who inject drugs.

Thank you for your partnership.

LHJ	Phone	Fax
Clark County Public Health	(564) 397-8182	(360) 397-8080
Cowlitz County Health Department	(360) 414-5599	(360) 425-7531
Skamania County Community Health	(509) 427-3850	(509) 427-0188
Wahkiakum County Health and Human Services	(360) 795-6207	(360) 795-6143

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