



**Office of the
Chief Medical
Health Officer**

February 19, 2019

HIV Prophylaxis, Syphilis and Treated STI Contacts

HIV PrEP – Progress Toward HIV Elimination

HIV Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has been publicly funded in BC for one year and we are pleased to see that many Vancouver Island patients have been started on the medication thanks to healthcare providers like yourself. On the Island over 250 patients have been enrolled in the PrEP program since the program began with the support of over 100 healthcare providers. Declines in community HIV transmission because of PrEP use have been documented in many jurisdictions globally; our goal is to see similar benefits for the BC population and a reduction of our HIV disease burden.

PrEP can be prescribed to eligible patients by physicians and nurse practitioners, and the medication is provided free of charge through the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (CfE) pharmacy. The Provincial PrEP guidelines are available online at cfenet.ubc.ca, and specialist support from the CfE through the REACH line (**1-800-665-7677**) is available 24 hours a day. A free online HIV Prevention course (up to 7 hours of MAINPRO credits) is also available through the Centre (education.cfenet.ubc.ca/courses/hiv-prevention).

STI screening- Include syphilis testing for everyone

Unfortunately, syphilis rates on Vancouver Island remain high, with ongoing transmission occurring in high risk populations including men who have sex with men (MSM). In 2018, there were 132 cases of infectious syphilis reported for Island Health, resulting in a rate of 16.6 cases/100 000 population. This is similar to the rate reported in 2017, but a marked increase from our rates just 5 years ago. There has also been a recent increase in syphilis cases among women, particularly in women age 25-39 years, which adds to the risk of potential congenital infections. We recommend syphilis testing to accompany *any* sexually transmitted infection screening, regardless of patient gender, and frequent screening (up to q3 months) for high risk patients. Reinfection after syphilis treatment is not uncommon in the current BC epidemic, so patients should be educated about their ongoing risk of re-exposure even after treatment. Prophylactic treatment is also recommended for contacts to cases of early syphilis, regardless of screening results. The BC Centre for Disease Control will provide patient-specific treatment recommendations.

Treat Contacts of STIs; Confirmatory Screening should not delay treatment

Recent sexual contacts to patients with chlamydia and gonorrhoea should also be treated empirically as soon as identified, as well as screened for all STIs. Many patients do not present with signs or symptoms of STIs, and delays in treatment increase the risk of exposure to new partners, as well as re-infection of treated cases. Treatment recommendations are in the BC STI Treatment guidelines, which can be found at bccdc.ca on the Communicable Disease Control Manual page.

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