



Expanded HIV testing guidelines will improve early diagnosis

Vancouver, British Columbia (December 3, 2010) – Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), Providence Health Care (PHC), and the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE), a program at PHC, are pleased to announce a significant expansion of HIV testing guidelines as part of the STOP HIV/AIDS pilot project.

Under the new guidelines, health care providers are encouraged to routinely offer an HIV test to individuals who meet any of the following criteria:

- Anyone who presents to acute or community care who has ever been sexually active and has not had an HIV test in the past year
- Individuals with a past history of sexually transmitted infection
- Anyone tested for or diagnosed with Hepatitis C, any sexually transmitted infection, or tuberculosis

These additions supplement existing guidelines based on the presence of HIV symptoms and provider awareness of a patient's HIV risk factors. By moving away from a risk-based approach to testing, the new guidelines will help diagnose infections in individuals outside currently recognized risk groups.

"Including HIV testing as a part of routine preventive health care will help alleviate the stigma around testing and promote early diagnosis of new infections," said Dr. Patricia Daly, Vice-President, Public Health and Chief Medical Health Officer, Vancouver Coastal Health.

An estimated 25 per cent of the approximately 13,000 British Columbians living with HIV are unaware of their infection. These undiagnosed individuals are not connected to appropriate treatment and support services and remain a significant risk to continue transmission of the virus.

"Our made-in-BC research has shown that antiretroviral treatment is not only life-saving for those infected but also a powerful tool to decrease infectiveness and therefore reduce rates of HIV transmission," said Dr. Julio Montaner, Director of the British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS. "Expanding access to HIV testing is a critical first step in identifying and linking patients to care and treatment through the STOP HIV/AIDS pilot project."

STOP HIV/AIDS (Seek and Treat for Optimal Prevention of HIV/AIDS) is a four-year, \$48-million program funded by the British Columbia Ministry of Health Services to improve access to HIV

testing, treatment, and support services in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and Prince George. Diagnosing HIV infection early and providing treatment to eligible individuals has the dual benefit of improving the health of patients and reducing the likelihood of HIV transmission.

"These updated guidelines reinforce the important work we have already initiated through STOP HIV/AIDS," said Dianne Doyle, President and CEO, Providence Health Care. "Along with expanded point-of-care testing, these guidelines give us the tools to dramatically improve the way we screen for HIV."

The revised testing guidelines were announced today to health care providers and community members at the bi-annual Antiretroviral Update hosted by the BC-CfE at the Sheraton Wall Centre.

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About Vancouver Coastal Health:

Vancouver Coastal Health is responsible for the delivery of \$2.9 billion in community, hospital and residential care to more than one million people in communities, including Richmond, Vancouver, the North Shore, Sunshine Coast, Sea to Sky corridor, Powell River, Bella Bella and Bella Coola.

About Providence Health Care:

Providence Health Care is one of Canada's largest faith-based health care organizations, operating 14 health care facilities in Greater Vancouver.. PHC operates one of two adult academic health science centres in the province, performs cutting-edge research in more than 30 clinical specialties, and focuses its services on six "populations of emphasis": cardio-pulmonary risks and illnesses, HIV/AIDS, mental health, renal risks and illness, specialized needs in aging and urban health and is home to the BC CFE in HIV/AIDS

About the B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS:

The B.C. Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) is Canada's largest HIV/AIDS research, treatment and education facility. Located at St Paul's Hospital in Vancouver, Canada, the BC-CfE is dedicated to improving the health of British Columbians with HIV through the development, monitoring and dissemination of comprehensive research and treatment programs for HIV and related diseases.

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