

Media Release

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REVISED GUIDELINES FOR GPs ADVISE INCREASED REGULAR HIV AND STI TESTING FOR GAY MEN

Continued high rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) among gay and other men who have sex with men (MSM) in NSW, including those who are HIV positive, have prompted a revision of the STI and HIV testing guidelines for NSW.

The guidelines, *2014 Sexually Transmitted Infection and HIV Testing Guidelines for Asymptomatic Men who have Sex with Men*, released this month by the Sexually Transmissible Infections in Gay Men Action Group (STIGMA) continue to recommend annual testing for gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis and HIV and more frequent testing for high risk men.

Last published in 2010, the revised guidelines now also recommend throat testing for chlamydia, and the use of electronic reminders for gay men and their clinicians to increase the regularity of testing, particularly for gay men in inner-Sydney and other Australian metropolitan centres.

Developed to assist GPs and primary health practitioners with comprehensive and regular testing of gay men, the revised guidelines also recommend conducting a behavioural risk assessment and promoting consistent condom use amongst gay men.

Karen Price, Chair of STIGMA and Director HIV and Sexual Health, ACON, said HIV and STI testing remained an essential component of improving health, wellbeing and efforts to end HIV transmission amongst gay men.

“We must acknowledge the great commitment many gay men have demonstrated in looking after their sexual health, but there is still more to do.

“The continuing high rates of STIs in the inner-Sydney area remain concerning, especially the significant increases in gonorrhoea observed over the last five years,” Ms Price said

A large proportion of STIs are being detected in gay men without any symptoms, which reinforces the need for regular testing. Infectious syphilis and STIs in the throat and rectum are particularly likely to be asymptomatic.

Associate Professor David Templeton, Senior Specialist, RPA Sexual Health Service said regular STI testing and consistent condom use are key to reducing STIs among gay men.

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"Swab and urine tests can be self-collected and we have effective, often single dose, treatments for many STIs," A/Prof Templeton said.

The revised guidelines align with the recent statewide 'Ending HIV' campaign, developed by ACON and adopted by the NSW Ministry of Health, one of the key aims of which is to increase HIV testing among gay men.

Conjoint Associate Professor Chris Bourne, Senior Specialist, Sydney Sexual Health Centre, said it was timely to have the updated guidelines released to support the campaign, and that the revised guidelines will go a long way in helping to combat increased rates of STIs and HIV amongst gay men.

"Gay men are recommended to get tested for other STIs at the same time as they are being tested for HIV, because many throat and rectal STIs, for example, do not have symptoms," A/Prof Bourne said.

The revised guidelines are endorsed by the Australasian Society for HIV Medicine, Australasian Sexual Health Alliance, Australasian Chapter of Sexual Health Medicine of the Royal Australasian College Of Physicians and are approved as an accepted clinical resource by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, and can be downloaded at: <http://stipu.nsw.gov.au/stigma/sti-testing-guidelines-for-msm/>