

CDC Recommends HIV Tests, Puts Less Stress on Condom Use

In a significant shift in strategy in the fight against HIV/AIDS, the Centers for Disease Control recently recommended that tests for HIV be extended to all patients entering hospitals and clinics in the U.S. The CDC also recommended that doctors begin offering routine voluntary HIV tests to patients between 13 and 64.

It is estimated that of the more than 1 million people in the U.S. with HIV and AIDS, about 25% are unaware they have HIV. The new strategy is aimed at discovering these cases before HIV develops into AIDS. It is also hoped these measures will curb the spread of the disease since these 250,000 people are carriers who unknowingly infect others.

This marks a departure from the previously followed strategy of testing only people in high risk categories.

This policy change will also involve a shift away from the promotion of abstinence and condom use to prevent the spread of the disease, towards more emphasis being placed on testing for HIV status and early treatment.

According to a spokesperson for the CDC, what explains this change in policy is that drugs now exist that can prevent the development of AIDS from HIV. Early detection can therefore result in early treatment. In the past early detection did not necessarily mean much since there was very little that could be done for someone infected with HIV.

It is also hoped that early detection will result in less transmission of the disease. A recent CDC survey found that sexually-active adults altered their sexual behavior patterns after they were diagnosed with HIV. They were less likely to engage in unprotected sexual activity, in many cases opting for a condom or for not engaging in sex at all.

Drug companies and makers of oral tests stand to benefit significantly from this change of emphasis. It is expected that tests which are now administered at hospitals and clinics will soon be available over the counter. People interested in testing themselves will be able to do it at home. This should result in a significant increase in sales of HIV testing kits.

There should also be a rise in HIV treatment drugs as hundreds of thousands of people learn they have HIV and begin treatment with anti-HIV drugs. Currently anti-HIV drugs account for about \$6-billion in sales in the U.S. That number should increase dramatically if the new testing procedures prove to be effective.

Some argue that as in so many areas within the health industry, efforts aimed at prevention will be replaced by promises of a quick cure brought to us compliments of the incredibly influential and increasingly invasive drug companies.

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