

## Health Advisory

### Increase in New HIV Diagnoses among People who Inject Drugs

October 4, 2018

- Be aware the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) has noted a 48% increase in new HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs (PWID). In the 12 month period ending 8/31/2018, the PDPH has identified 46 new cases of HIV among PWID compared to 31 cases in the previous 12 months;
- From January-August 2018, there have been 31 new infections reported among PWID;
- Be advised that of the newly identified HIV cases in 2018, HCV co-infection was identified in 57% of the newly diagnosed cases;
- **Offer testing to high-risk persons.** PDPH recommends immediate HIV and Hepatitis C testing for all PWID who have not been tested in the last 3 months. Testing should be repeated regularly for all persons at high risk for HIV infection, including PWID, people who are experiencing homelessness, and people who exchange sex for money or drugs;
- **Provide referrals to effective harm reduction services, like Prevention Point Philadelphia.** Sterile syringes and drug use equipment save lives and prevent new HIV and Hepatitis C infections;
- **Provide care for all patients**, which includes discussions about sexual behaviors and drug use;
- **Report ALL new cases of HIV infection in PWID to PDPH** promptly by phone to 215-685-4789 with as much risk history, clinical, and demographic data as you can obtain; and,
- **Utilize Partner Services (PS) offered by the PDPH** to assist in HIV partner notification and linkage to HIV medical care, support services, and insurance. PS can be reached by contacting 215-685-6612.

#### SUMMARY POINTS

- In a one-year period, there was a 48% increase in new HIV diagnoses among people who inject drugs (PWID).
- PDPH recommends immediate HIV and Hepatitis C testing for all PWID who have not been tested in the last 3 months. Testing should be repeated regularly for all persons at high risk for HIV infection.
- Provide referrals to harm reduction services; sterile syringes and drug use equipment save lives and prevent new HIV and Hepatitis C infections.

The HIV epidemic in Philadelphia is highly concentrated in men who have sex with men (MSM), and it is unusual for the PDPH to identify new diagnoses of HIV in PWID. In recent years, Philadelphia has been experiencing an epidemic in use of and addiction to opioids. This epidemic is characterized by the introduction of fentanyl in the illicit drug supply, a rise in the number of people who inject drugs, an increase in homelessness among drug users, an increase in Hepatitis C transmission, and sharp increases in fatal and non-fatal drug overdoses. Previously sustained reductions in HIV infections from injection drug use in Philadelphia were likely due to several protective factors, including: access to sterile syringes through Prevention Point Philadelphia, access to drug treatment, and behavioral changes among experienced users.

However, as other areas throughout the Nation have demonstrated, rapid reintroduction of HIV into a low incidence population is possible and can lead to an outbreak at any time.

These recent changes have the potential to foster HIV transmission in a local population that has not recently experienced high rates of HIV. A current investigation of cases is on-going. It is too early to conclude that the area is experiencing a new trend in HIV infection. However, community members, health care providers, and others who work with PWID, people living homeless, and people who exchange sex should be aware that these populations may be experiencing a rising and renewed risk for HIV infection and follow the guidance recommended above.