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RE: HIV Infection

Prevalence of HIV infection in the Bournemouth area is now approximately 3 per 1000 people.

NHS recognised guidelines recommend that all new patients registering with any GP in areas of prevalence greater than 2 per 1000 are offered an HIV test as a routine procedure, so that fewer people will present with late manifestations of HIV infection.

HIV infection is now very well managed with many sufferers living long healthy lives if it is detected early and appropriate treatment given. Survival rates are better than some other chronic conditions like heart disease or diabetes when HIV is detected early.

The NHS recognises the importance of HIV screening in areas of high prevalence and the costs of these population-screening tests are far outweighed by the improved patient health with early detection.

HIV infection in the heterosexual and homosexual community is increasing (including in older age groups) due to previous unprotected sexual encounters. This may have been when the person passing on the HIV was unaware of their HIV status, and sometimes the sexual encounter or drug use was many years ago.

We therefore encourage adult patients of all ages to consider having this test on registration at our practice.

Thank you

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The HIV test – what you need to know

Please read the following details to ensure that you understand the facts of the test.

Q. Why have an HIV test?

A. Treatment is available for people with HIV infection; it is better to have treatment before serious symptoms develop. Only by knowing that you are infected do you have a choice of using these treatments before you get ill. These treatments have been shown to reduce dramatically the risk of serious illness and early death from AIDS. If you know that you have HIV you can also take steps to reduce the risk of passing it on to others, including unborn children. TESTING IS CONFIDENTIAL

Q. What if I am found to have HIV infection?

A. If a test shows you have HIV infection you will be offered care and support. Whether or not you should start treatment will be discussed and treatment given if you need it.

Q. How long does it take before the infection will show up in my blood sample?

A. The HIV test measures antibodies to HIV, which may take three months to show up in your blood after you have been exposed.

Q. Have I been at risk? How is HIV transmitted?

A. HIV can be passed on in a number of ways:

- Through contact with infected body fluids such as blood, semen and vaginal secretions. This may occur during sex.
- Using inadequately sterilised needles or equipment for injecting drugs, tattooing or piercing.
- Through a blood transfusion with unscreened blood abroad.
- From an infected woman to her baby before or during birth, or through breastfeeding

Q. What are the drawbacks of having this test?

A. If your results do show that you have HIV the benefits of knowing this result usually outweigh any drawbacks. These drawbacks may include worries about relationships with family and friends. Travel to some countries is currently being restricted for people who know they have HIV. In a few cases, being HIV positive may affect your employment.

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Q. Is the result confidential?

A. Yes, your confidentiality will be protected according to the General Medical Council guidance.

Q. Will it affect my chance of getting life insurance?

A. Doctors do not need to report negative HIV tests when writing insurance reports. Insurance companies should no longer ask whether you have had an HIV test, but only enquire whether or not you are HIV positive. People who know they are infected with HIV can have difficulty obtaining new life insurance; this can also affect their ability to obtain certain types of mortgages. This is the same for many other long-term illnesses.

Q. When will I get the results?

A. Results are normally available after a week. We are able to have HIV test results earlier where necessary.

PLEASE TALK TO A DOCTOR OR NURSE IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION