



# HEALT AND HIV /AIDS PREVENTION

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## Health Assessment

A public health assessment is conducted to determine whether and to what extent people have been, are being, or may be exposed to hazardous substances associated with a hazardous waste site and, if so, whether that exposure is harmful and should be stopped or reduced.

There are a number of goals of the process that you should keep in mind throughout your assessment.

These are:

- Evaluate site conditions and determine the nature and extent of environmental contamination.
- Define potential human exposure pathways related to site-specific environmental contaminants.
- Identify who may be or may have been exposed to environmental contamination associated with a site (past, current, and future).
- Examine the public health implications of site-related exposures, through the examination of environmental and health effects data (toxicologic, epidemiologic, medical, and health outcome data).
- Address those implications by recommending relevant public health actions to prevent harmful exposures.
- Identify and respond to community health concerns and clearly communicate the findings of the assessment.

## Factors to Be Considered in All Public Health Assessments

### Nature and extent of contamination

What is the spatial and temporal extent of site-related contamination? Have contaminants migrated off site? What media have been and/or continue to be affected (e.g., water, soil, air, food chain [biota])?

### Demographics (population size and susceptibility)

Who is being exposed, and do any special populations need to be considered (e.g., children, women of child-bearing age, fetuses, lactating women, the elderly)?

### Pathways of human exposure (past, current, and future)

How might people be exposed to site-related contamination (e.g., drinking water, breathing air, direct skin contact)? What are the site-specific exposure conditions (e.g., duration, frequency, and magnitude of exposure)?

### Health effects and disease-related data

How do expected site-specific exposure levels for the identified hazardous substances compare with the observed health effect levels (from toxicologic, epidemiologic, and medical studies), and with any available recommended exposure or tolerance limits (e.g. water quality standards)? How do existing morbidity and mortality data on diseases compare with observed levels of exposure?

Public health actions vary from site to site and may include:

Actions to reduce exposures. If current harmful exposures are identified, removal or clean-up actions may be recommended. This will generally involve working with the appropriate federal, state, or tribal agencies.

Exposure investigations.

As part of your exposure evaluation, you may determine that critical exposure data are missing. In such cases, the site team may recommend environmental or biologic sampling to better define the extent, if any, of harmful exposures .

Health education.

Throughout the public health assessment process, you may identify the need for education within a community. For example, partner's Division of Health Education and Promotion or the appropriate local health department may educate health professionals about special diagnostic techniques for possible site-related illnesses identified during the public health assessment process.

Health services.

Site conditions may identify the need for certain community health interventions, such as medical monitoring or psychological stress counseling. Referrals may be made to health care providers (e.g., community health centers or local health departments) when health services are needed that may improve the overall health of the community.

## HIV PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

### RISK FACTORS FOR HIV TRANSMISSION

HIV is an infectious disease carried in body fluids, such as semen, vaginal fluid, blood, and breast milk. It is primarily spread through blood-to-blood contact and contact between blood and semen or blood and vaginal fluid.

HIV can be transmitted from person to person. For example:

- During vaginal or anal intercourse without a latex or polyurethane condom with a person who is HIV-positive
- During unprotected oral sex with a person who is HIV-positive, when semen, vaginal fluid or menstrual blood can enter the bloodstream through cuts or sores in the mouth, even those that are not visible or noticeable
- When sharing sex toys between people without cleaning or sanitizing them
- When using blood-contaminated needles, syringes, water, cotton filters, straws, or pipes that contain HIV to inject drugs or other substances; often the blood contamination is not visible to the naked eye
- By using needles or ink contaminated with blood that contain HIV for tattooing, skin piercing, scarification rituals, or acupuncture
- Through breastfeeding (i.e., the virus can pass from the mother to her nursing baby).
- Although HIV is found in other body fluids, like saliva, mucus, or vomit, it is not present in large enough concentrations to be transmitted through contact with those fluids.

### Harm Reduction Strategies

Reduce risks related to sexual transmission of HIV by:

- Knowing your HIV status
- Reducing the number of sexual partners
- Increasing condom use
- Reducing frequency of 'higher risk' behaviours
- Minimizing or eliminating drug misuse/abuse
- Keeping medical appointments
- Reducing other health risks

Reduce risks associated with injection drug use by:

- Using a needle/syringe exchange
- Cleaning needles with bleach

- Being on methadone treatment
- Shifting to drug taking methods that do not involve injecting or use of broken or shared crack pipes

Reduce risks associated with other substance use (including alcohol) by:

- Reducing the frequency of use
  - Being knowledgeable about and avoiding drug interactions
  - Staying hydrated
  - Keeping medical appointments
  - Not driving or doing other tasks that put you or others at risk
  - Maintaining good nutrition
- Never assume that men are exclusively either heterosexual or gay
  - Discuss the risks associated with unprotected sex with multiple sex partners
  - Discuss the full range of HIV prevention options without bias and provide information they can use to protect themselves and their partners
  - Reinforce that relationship status does not protect against HIV
  - Explain that, in heterosexual relationships, men are twice as likely to transmit HIV and other STIs to their female partners than vice versa (in addition, the risk is always greater for the receiving partner, whether it is a female, male, or transgendered person)
  - Highlight that men can play a unique and valuable role in HIV prevention in their communities by educating themselves and other men
  - Listen carefully to their objections to HIV testing and prevention and help them overcome the barriers (recognizing that this is an ongoing process)
  - Encourage them to select and use HIV prevention methods (e.g., using condoms, reducing the number of partners, engaging in non-penetrative sex), even if they are in long-term relationships, in order to protect current and future partners, from any risks associated with sexual activity outside the relationship
  - Help them develop a contingency plan in case they engage in sexual behaviour outside their primary relationship
  - Recommend regular HIV and other STI testing (e.g., once a year and when partner(s) are changed or added).

How the information is presented is just as important as what is shared. For example, explaining mucous membrane immunity provides opportunities to openly discuss anal, vaginal, and oral sex, as well as ways to prevent HIV transmission.

#### Components of Pre-Test Counseling

- Assessing the person's risk of HIV infection
- Determining whether the person might be in the window period
- Providing information about how HIV is acquired
- Identifying risk related activities and ways to avoid or reduce risk
- Discussing HIV testing options available in the region and their differences
- Discussing record-keeping for each testing option and access to those records by other health-care professionals
- Discussing the advantages and disadvantages of HIV testing
- Determining the timing of testing and the post-test visit if the person chooses to proceed with the HIV test

Note: Some territories have 'opt-in' HIV testing programs while others have 'opt-out' HIV testing programs. Consult a physician, health care provider or Public Health to determine what type of HIV testing programme is used.