



Testing for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C in London hospital emergency departments

April 2022

Frequently asked questions

What is happening?

National Health Service England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) are expanding opt-out testing in emergency departments in the highest prevalence local authority areas, a proven effective way to identify new cases, and will invest £20m over the next three years to support this activity. All London Emergency Departments are taking part, plus taking this opportunity to diagnose and support people with additional blood borne viruses – hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

- London is world-leading in clinical outcomes for people living with HIV, it aims to be the first city in the world to end new cases of HIV.
- Testing is crucial to get to zero new HIV infections, zero preventable deaths and zero stigma by 2030.
- Recent @UKHSA data showed that almost half (42%) of people diagnosed with HIV in England in 2020 were diagnosed late.
- People can live with HIV for a long time without any symptoms, and testing is the only way to know your HIV status.
- If you have HIV, finding out means you can start treatment, stay healthy and avoid passing the virus on to anyone else.

Our ambition is for opt out HIV testing to be rolled out consistently across all London Emergency Departments from April this year, building upon the successful pilots taking place in a number of Trusts including Croydon, Guy's and St Thomas', King's College, Homerton and Chelsea and Westminster.

Why include hepatitis B and hepatitis C?

Like HIV, there is stigma associated with hepatitis and getting tested. London is also leading the way in eliminating Hep-B and Hep-C and we want this to continue. It's an easy process to collect blood and test for these three blood-borne viruses at the same time. It makes better use of NHS resources while also normalising testing into an everyday, routine activity that will help reduce stigma. Funding has been provided by NHS England.

Are all London Emergency Departments now screening for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C?

All London EDs are aiming to include HIV with their routine blood tests from April, with hepatitis B and hepatitis C screening included within the next months. The necessary changes to internal hospital processes are already underway.

Will everyone attending a London Emergency Department get tested for all 3 viruses?

Yes, if you are 16 or over and have a blood test as part of your ED attendance, your blood will now also be routinely screened for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

Is testing for HIV, Hep-B and Hep-C free for everyone?

Yes, testing is free for everyone who is having a blood test as part of their ED attendance. This is regardless of whether they live permanently in the UK. Testing and treatment of STIs, HIV and viral hepatitis is free to all, regardless of immigration status, under public health grounds for management of communicable diseases.

Is treatment for HIV, Hep-B and Hep-C free for everyone?

Yes, everyone accessing care in the UK will be able to receive treatment for free. Testing and treatment of STIs, HIV and viral hepatitis is free to all, regardless of immigration status, under public health grounds for management of communicable diseases. Up to 3 months prescribed treatment can be given to patients who are being removed from the country, so in terms of Hep-C a full course of treatment is always possible. For HIV and Hep-B NHS standard treatment and support will be provided whilst in the country, and while receiving treatment individuals would be supported with advice so that on leaving the UK they are can be responsible for continuing their own care.

Treatment for HIV is long term, how do I reassure someone who is not a permanent UK resident that they will be supported with the right care?

Treatment for HIV is free for everyone regardless of immigration status and those without access to public funds. Up to 3 months prescribed treatment can be given to patients who are being removed from the country. HIV requires ongoing intervention; NHS standard treatment and support will be provided whilst in the country and while receiving treatment individuals would be supported with advice so that on leaving the UK they are can be responsible for continuing their own care.

Treatment for Hep-B is long term, how do I reassure someone who is not a permanent UK resident that they will be supported with the right care?

Treatment for viral hepatitis is free for everyone regardless of immigration status and those without access to public funds. Up to 3 months prescribed treatment can be given to patients who are being removed from the country. Hep-B requires ongoing intervention; NHS standard treatment and support will be provided whilst in the country and while receiving treatment individuals would be supported with advice so that on leaving the UK they are can be responsible for continuing their own care.

Where can I find more resources to help with the roll out of testing in London emergency departments

Go to www.fasttrackcities.london/testinginae

I am an Emergency Department patient...

Why is my blood being tested for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C?

HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C are blood-borne viruses that are easily treated once diagnosed. It is best to diagnose them as early as possible before they begin to harm your health. Without the right care their effects can become life threatening. All patients aged 16 and over are tested as part of routine blood testing for the Emergency Department.

What if I do not want to know whether I have these viruses?

We are encouraging everyone who does not already know whether they have these viruses to have the test. Knowing and getting treatment can save your life. If you don't want to be tested, for example if you already know whether you have all 3 of these viruses, please let a member of staff know.

What happens if my test is positive?

Your results are confidential and we will only share your result with our NHS specialists so that you receive care. Our team will contact you to ask you to have another test to confirm the diagnosis and discuss your treatment. Therapies are safe and effective and allow your body to repair the damage to your immune system. People on effective medication live well.

Will I get a result if the test is negative?

No, we will only contact you if the test is positive. Sometimes the result is unclear and we would contact you to ask to re-test you.

What is the treatment for these viruses?

Treatment is different for each virus. All are safe, effective and easy to take. They will help you stay well, and also help stop the viruses being passed on. Hepatitis C can be completely cured. With the right treatment you can expect to live long and well. Treatment is free from the NHS.

Where can I find out more information about these viruses?

HIV

NHS (HIV and aids page)

www.nhs.uk/conditions/hiv-and-aids

Do it London

www.doitlondon.org

National Aids Trust

www.nat.org.uk

Terrance Higgins Trust

www.tht.org.uk

Hepatitis B

NHS (hepatitis B page)

www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis-b

British Liver Trust

www.britishlivertrust.org.uk

Hepatitis C

NHS (hepatitis V page)

www.nhs.uk/conditions/hepatitis-c

Hepatitis C Trust

www.hepctrust.org.uk