



Module: Delivering Results and Support

Materials in this module will help you:

- Tell clients their HIV test is reactive (or positive)
- Offer emotional and practical support to clients who have received this news; support them to begin the next steps in their care
- Talk to clients who have positive/reactive tests about notifying and protecting their partners
- Deliver news of a non-reactive test; reinforce prevention messages and share information about other services (PrEP, harm reduction, mental health) as needed

Delivering Results

Be direct: for example, **“It’s not the news we hoped for. Your test is reactive.”**

- Provide immediate comfort and support. Expect a range of emotional responses: disbelief, shock, anger (at you or a former partner), guilt, shame, fear, or anxiety; people may also express relief at having symptoms explained, or no emotional response
- Encourage them to express their emotions
- Remind them that there are now many treatments for HIV that allow people to live long, healthy lives. You will help them find a doctor and other supports they need.
- Double back to talk about the people in their life that can support them (discussed in the pre-test counselling); will they be able to see this person today?
- Start the discussion about next steps

Follow-up to a Reactive Result

- Talk about where clients can go for HIV treatment, and if possible, make an appointment for them (optimally within 72 hours); encourage them to consider prompt treatment to maximize the health benefits and better protect partners
- Recommend standard testing to confirm the diagnosis; obtain consent and draw blood if consenting
- **Schedule an appointment** (in about a week) for them to return for their test results and to follow up on today’s conversations – even if they decline standard testing
- Explain that test results, and the result of the standard testing will be reported to Public Health (either anonymously or nominally depending how the testing was done); inform nominal testers about the process of public health follow-up they can anticipate
- Talk about protecting current and future partners; the legal requirements around disclosure (see the discussion of legal issues around disclosure on the next page) and what they want to tell family and others



Linkage to care is vital after a reactive test; 18% of people are not linked to care within three months jeopardizing their health. You can help make a difference.



Follow-up to a Non-Reactive Result

Most of the test results you provide will be non-reactive. These are just as important as the reactive tests. Important issues to discuss or review after a reactive test include:

- Discuss when they should return for further testing – either routine testing or follow-up (3-6-3 schedule testing) for a high risk exposure.
- Talk about any appropriate services or referrals that you might have identified during the risk assessment (harm reduction, addictions, PrEP, risk reduction counselling, etc.) Provide practical information (phone numbers, web sites, brochures or make a warm referral when possible.)
- Re-cap any suggestions about protective strategies from pre-counselling discussions

Public Health Processes

When a client tests nominally (using their real name and OHIP number), the Public Health Unit where they live is automatically notified about their positive test by the Public Health Ontario Laboratory. In accordance with [Ontario's Infectious Disease Protocol](#), and the current [best practice recommendations](#) for Public Health STI case management, Public Health will contact the client as soon as possible after being notified of a positive test, ideally within 2 days. Public health staff will work with the client to:

- Actively engage them in entering and continuing HIV care and to start antiretroviral therapy
- Refer clients to treatment, including community and mental health services as needed, and follow-up with them periodically
- Help manage other health challenges
- Ensure individuals engaging in high-risk behaviours have the support needed to change those behaviours
- Carry out partner notification
- Develop an approach to care for each client

If a client tests anonymously, the local Public Health Unit is notified about their test, but not their identity. However, as a HIV test counsellor, you can contact Public Health about your client's sexual contacts and have them do follow-up contact tracing without revealing your client's identity. Alternatively, if the client does not wish to involve Public Health or speak to their contacts directly, they can use online services like InSPOT (<https://www.inspot.org/>).

Disclosure (Legal)

Disclosure means telling people you are HIV-positive. Except when there is a "realistic possibility of transmission" to a sexual partner, this is not something a person living with HIV is required to do. Advise clients:

- To tell a future sexual partner before any penetrative sexual act. Although condoms will reduce the risk of HIV transmission, until HIV treatment can lower their viral load, * it is still possible for them to face criminal charges if they don't disclose their status.
- Beyond this obligation, be selective who they tell at this early stage. They only need to tell people that will be supportive and helpful

* Once a person has been undetectable for six months, they cannot transmit HIV and will not be charged if they do not tell a sexual partner, as long as they take their medications regularly and remain undetectable.



Resources about disclosure

- *HIV Disclosure: Figuring out how to tell romantic & sexual partners* – Created by CATIE and the Positive Women’s Network in 2016, this guide was created, primarily for women, considering disclosure conversations with their intimate partners.
At: <http://librarypdf.catie.ca/PDF/ATI-20000s/26526.pdf>
- *HIV disclosure: Figuring out how to tell children and family* – Created by CATIE and the Positive Women’s Network in 2016, this guide was created, primarily for women, considering disclosure conversations with their children and family.
At: <http://librarypdf.catie.ca/PDF/ATI-20000s/26527.pdf>

Resources about the legal requirement to notify a sexual partner

- The HIV/AIDS Legal Clinic of Ontario (HALCO) provide support on a range of legal issues related to HIV including the legal requirement to notify sexual partners, and the legal consequences of not doing so. See <https://www.halco.org/areas-of-law/hiv-criminal-law> for regular updates.
- *HIV disclosure: a legal guide for gay men in Canada* – This guide, created by CATIE and HALCO was produced in 2013. At: <https://www.catie.ca/en/practical-guides/hiv-disclosure>

Resources for the Newly Diagnosed Clients

Starting Points – Living with HIV – This resource, produced by CATIE and PWA Toronto in 2015 offers basic information about HIV, treatment and disclosure. At: <https://www.catie.ca/en/practical-guides/starting-point>

CATIE’s Just Diagnosed page – Is a useful resource for newly diagnosed clients, and will also link your client to CATIE, for more, when they are ready. At: <https://www.catie.ca/en/practical-guides/just-diagnosed-hiv>

Caring for Yourself

It can be stressful to tell someone that they are HIV positive.

- Take the time you need after a stressful appointment.
- Identify colleagues or others in your workplace who might provide support.
- Learn about the internal processes for self-care at your site

Here are some resources that may be helpful. Although none of them were specifically created for HIV test counsellors, they may give you some ideas about how to manage the challenges you encounter in your work life, and the stress that comes with these challenges.

- *Self-care for Peer Researchers* – This e-learning course was created for community-based HIV peer researchers having difficult conversations with research participants. Useful, particularly if HIV has an impact on your personal as well as professional life. At: <http://www.universitieswithoutwalls.ca/peer-researchers/self-care-for-peer-researchers/>
- *Reach Out: Self care for professionals* – This Australian resource for mental health counsellors offers a number of useful tools to assess your own well-being and create a self-care plan. At: <https://schools.au.reachout.com/articles/self-care-for-professionals>
- Self-Care Starter Kit – This basic guide from Homewood Health (a Canadian provider of mental health and addictions care) is a simple tool to begin considering this issues. At: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellbeing/files/wellbeing/self-care-starter-kit.pdf>