

Higher HIV infection estimate shows need for routine screening, more funding for care

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Arlington, VA—The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is expected soon to increase the estimate of new HIV infections in the United States by 40 percent. This highlights the need to make HIV testing a routine part of medical care and provide better funding to care for those who test positive, according to the HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA).

"The fact that more people in the United States are infected with HIV every year than previously thought shows that we need to be working much harder to control the epidemic in the United States," said HIVMA Chair Arlene Bardeguez, MD, MPH, professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

CDC has published guidelines recommending HIV screening in emergency rooms, public health clinics, regular doctor visits, and other routine interactions with the health care system. This would increase the opportunities to find those who are infected and connect them with medical care before the disease does irreparable harm to their immune systems. Also, more and more research is showing that those with their HIV infections under control are less likely to spread the disease to others.

But Congress has not provided CDC with the funding it needs to put the HIV testing initiative into action. Funding for other prevention initiatives at CDC is also languishing. And states have not passed the legislation needed to allow routine HIV screening to move forward.

Furthermore, the federal Ryan White CARE Act, the program that provides medical care to low-income, uninsured, and under-insured people with HIV, is already struggling to handle the growing number of patients. Funding has been flat for years as the number of cases continues to rise. It needs a substantial increase in funding to handle the load as the HIV testing initiative uncovers more cases.

"The United States can be proud of having more than tripled its remarkable commitment to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic," said Daniel R. Kuritzkes, MD, past chair of HIVMA and director of AIDS research at Harvard University's Brigham and Women's Hospital. "These new figures from the CDC demonstrate that the domestic epidemic needs a similar response. We call on the federal government to renew its commitment to prevention, care, and research into the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States."

Source: Infectious Diseases Society of America

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