

Britain lifts ban on health workers with HIV

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The British government said Thursday it would lift a ban on staff with HIV working in the state-run National Health Service from carrying out certain procedures on patients.

Staff who are undergoing treatment for HIV will be able to carry out all procedures from which they are currently banned, including surgery and [dentistry](#), provided they are having effective anti-retroviral drug therapy.

England's chief medical officer, Professor Sally Davies, said there was no proof that anyone had contracted HIV from a [health worker](#) and it was time to scrap "outdated rules".

She said improved treatment meant HIV, the [human immunodeficiency virus](#) that can lead to AIDS, could often be managed and carriers could lead long and normal lives.

Self-testing kits for HIV will also be legalised in Britain from April 2014, to improve early detection of the disease.

"We've got outdated rules," said Davies.

"At the moment we bar totally safe [healthcare workers](#) who are on treatment with HIV from performing many surgical treatments, and that includes dentists."

She said: "What we want to do—and want to get over—is how society needs to move from thinking about HIV as positive or negative and

thinking about HIV as a [death sentence](#), to thinking about whether they're infectious or not infectious."

Davies said huge improvements in the treatment of HIV meant that today, carriers can lead "lives that are normal in quality and length".

"With effective treatment, they are not infectious," she added.

There are about 100,000 people with HIV in Britain although experts say a quarter of those who are infected do not know they have it.

In 2011, there were around 6,000 new diagnoses of HIV.

Apart from being on retroviral drugs, healthcare workers must also have an undetectable viral load of HIV, meaning the level of the virus in their blood is so low that the likelihood of transmitting it to another person is greatly reduced.

They will also have to be monitored every three months and sign a confidential register of infected staff.

There have been just four cases in Western countries of health workers infecting patients, with no cases ever recorded in Britain.

Deborah Jack, chief executive of the National Aids Trust (NAT), welcomed the new policy, which she said was "based on up-to-date scientific evidence and not on fear, stigma or outdated information".

Professor Damien Walmsley, scientific advisor to the British Dental Association, said the change brought Britain in line with many other countries.

"Dentists in the UK comply with rigorous infection control procedures to

protect both patients and the dental team against the risk of transmission of blood-borne infections," he added.

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