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**CLINICAL ADVISORY:
ROUTINE HIV SCREENING IN PRIMARY AND URGENT
CARE SETTINGS IN MASSACHUSETTS**

TO: Massachusetts Primary Care and Urgent Care Providers

FROM: John Auerbach, Commissioner of Public Health
Lauren Smith, MD, MPH, Medical Director
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Date: June 24, 2009

Re: Routine HIV Screening

This Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) Clinical Advisory is meant to communicate the Department's strong support of HIV screening as a component of routine primary and urgent care in the Commonwealth. In September 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued the "*Revised Recommendations for HIV Testing of Adults, Adolescents, and Pregnant Women in Health-Care Settings*" in which the CDC recommends the routine screening of all adult and adolescent patients for HIV infection.¹

The CDC revised recommendations advocate for including routine HIV screening as part of the normal standard of care provided to patients, regardless of the patient's risk history or motivation for seeking health care or whether the patient presents with symptoms of HIV infection. Routine HIV screening identifies unsuspected HIV infection and facilitates rapid referral and early entry into clinical care.

Early identification of HIV infection and initiation of appropriate care can reduce morbidity, mortality and transmission to others. However, between 2005 and 2007 in Massachusetts, **31% of all individuals newly diagnosed with HIV infection progressed to an AIDS diagnosis within two months** indicating that they were diagnosed late in the course of their infection. (Massachusetts HIV/AIDS Epidemic at a Glance Factsheet, November 2008). Routine HIV screening in primary and urgent care settings can identify individuals infected with HIV who

¹ Health care settings with a documented prevalence of 0.1% or greater of undiagnosed HIV infection in patients are recommended to provide routine screening for HIV of all patients aged 13-64 years.

would otherwise not have been tested, increasing the number of HIV+ patients who receive the early care shown to prevent or delay progression of the infection. Knowledge of one's HIV infection is also associated with reduced risk behavior and subsequent transmission.

The 2006 revised recommendations state "HIV infection is consistent with all generally accepted criteria that justify screening," including:

- HIV infection is a serious illness that can be diagnosed prior to the presentation of symptoms;
- HIV infection can be detected using reliable, inexpensive and noninvasive tests;
- HIV positive patients may avoid serious morbidity and mortality and experience a long and productive life if diagnosed and treated early;
- Benefits of testing and knowing one's HIV status are greater than the direct costs of screening.

Routine screening for HIV infection is also recommended for:

- all patients initiating treatment for tuberculosis
- all patients seeking testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections
- all pregnant women (ideally during the routine panel of prenatal tests and possibly again during the third trimester, depending on evidence of ongoing risk behaviors).

Currently in the Commonwealth, Massachusetts General Laws, C. 111, § 70F requires written informed consent for HIV testing. **However, general consent for medical care containing a distinct, time-limited consent for HIV testing is sufficient.** MDPH has developed model informed consent language which facilities/practices may choose to adapt for local use (see attached language). Review of MDPH-issued patient information material regarding HIV testing is considered adequate prevention counseling and is recommended to accompany any HIV screening (see attached brochure).

Health care providers are encouraged to assess their clinical environments, patient population, and resources to determine the best way to incorporate routine HIV screening into their clinical practice. MDPH has developed the guide, *Implementing Routine HIV Testing in Clinical Settings in Massachusetts*, which describes three models for implementation and identifies components of service to consider prior to implementation (see attached document). In addition, the American Medical Association (AMA) and the American Academy of HIV Medicine (AAHIVM) have developed *Coding guidelines for routine HIV testing in health care settings* to address reimbursement (this document is also attached).

MDPH is committed to assisting primary and urgent care providers to implement routine HIV testing in order to increase the early detection and effective treatment of HIV infection. Along with this Clinical Advisory you will find:

- *Implementing Routine HIV Testing in Clinical Settings in Massachusetts*
- Model Informed Consent language
- MDPH brochure *Counseling and Testing HIV Questions and Answers*
- *Coding guidelines for routine HIV testing in health care settings* (AMA/AAHIVM)
- *Frequently Asked Questions regarding MGL C.111§70F*
- Circular letter regarding laboratory regulation governing HIV specimen testing

To access these documents go to www.mass.gov/dph/aids.