

ID CORNER

Importance of HIV screening

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Although it can be challenging to think about screenings while trying to fix potentially life-threatening conditions, hospitalists need to actively screen for HIV infection. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1.1 million people aged 13 and older had HIV infection in the United States at the end of 2016, including an estimated 162,500 (14%) people with undiagnosed infection. The number of new HIV diagnoses in the United States was 38,281 in 2017.

The US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends screening for HIV in persons aged 15 to 65 years. Younger and older persons should also be screened if they are at increased risk. HIV screening tests such as antigen/antibody combos (HIV-1 p24 antigen and antibodies for HIV-1 and HIV-2) are highly accurate, with 99.7-100% sensitivity and 99.5-100% specificity.

The benefit of HIV screening is substantial as identification and early treatment of HIV infection reduces the risk of death from HIV related complications. Additionally, the use of anti-retroviral therapy to achieve viral suppression reduces the risk of transmission to uninfected sexual partners. The evidence shows that people with HIV and an undetectable viral load do not transmit it by sexual contact (known as Undetectable = Untransmittable or the “U=U” campaign).

More recently, the USPSTF has recommended to offer routinely pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for the prevention of HIV infection in persons at high risk of HIV acquisition.

The combination of prevention of HIV infection with barrier methods and PrEP, early detection of infection with HIV screening, and treatment to achieve undetectable viral load will help to end the HIV epidemic.

Notes

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Further reading:

- www.cdc.gov
- Screening for HIV Infection. US Preventive Services Task Force Recommendation Statement. *JAMA*. 2019;321(23):2326-2336
- www.aidsinfo.nih.gov