

Health Notice to District of Columbia Health Care Providers***Rapid Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) Initiation for People Diagnosed with HIV***

July 1, 2020

The District of Columbia Department of Health supports evidence-based, patient-centered initiatives to reduce HIV transmission, improve the lives of people diagnosed with HIV, and reduce health disparities which may be exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic.

To support this mission, **we recommend rapid ART initiation as soon as possible following HIV diagnosis**. This is consistent with recommendations from the following groups:

- [World Health Organization](#) (2017): Recommended ART initiation within 0-7 days of confirmed HIV diagnosis
- [International Antiviral Society-USA Panel](#) (2018): Recommended ART initiation for all ambulatory patients who are committed to starting ART, unless there is uncertainty about the diagnosis or medical contraindication, such as opportunistic infection
- [New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute](#) (2019): Recommended ART initiation on the day of diagnosis or first clinical visit
- [US Department of Health and Human Services Guidelines for the Use of Antiretroviral Agents in Adults and Adolescents with HIV](#) (2019): Recommended ART initiation as soon as possible after HIV diagnosis, facilitated by removal of structural barriers

WHY? Rapid ART initiation provides both individual and public health benefits, including faster time to viral suppression and lower risk of transmitting HIV to others.

WHO? People newly diagnosed with HIV are eligible for rapid ART initiation, as long as they demonstrate readiness and do not have medical complications that would make this unsafe. Some examples of contraindications to rapid ART initiation are irregular adherence to antiretrovirals (such as PrEP), or opportunistic infections such as cryptococcal meningitis or tuberculosis. Notably, resistance to initial first-line antiretroviral therapy regimens among people diagnosed in DC has been low ([HAHSTA Annual Epidemiology and Surveillance Report](#), section on Transmitted Drug Resistance).

HOW? To determine how recently someone was diagnosed with HIV, health care providers can call the DC Department of Health, HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis, STD and TB Administration, at **(202) 741-7692** and ask for the Disease Intervention Specialist (DIS) on-call at the clinic to look up the individual in the surveillance system. As a reminder, all new HIV cases should be reported here: <https://dchealth.dc.gov/publication/hahsta-notifiable-disease-report-form>.

We recognize that ambulatory care has shifted to a remote access model during the COVID-19 pandemic. DC Department of Health will work with sites to assist in implementing or enhancing rapid ART initiation in order to balance healthcare worker safety and access to care.

Please contact us with questions or concerns (RapidART@dc.gov). Thank you for your efforts to reduce new HIV infections in the District of Columbia.

Sincerely,

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