Still a big concern

HIV was first discovered in 1983. By 1984 we knew that it caused AIDS. Since then, over half a million Americans have died of HIV.¹ Today, 1.1 million are living with the infection, and almost one-fifth of them don’t even know it.¹ In 2010 alone,

- Almost 48,300 more Americans were diagnosed with HIV.¹
- The U.S. government spent more than $513 million on HIV education, prevention, research, and surveillance.¹

These numbers don’t even begin to reflect the pain and misery caused by HIV nor the cost of treating those with the disease. So it’s no surprise that HIV is still a huge public concern 30 years after being discovered.

Anyone can be infected with HIV

Anyone can get HIV. Men, women, children, and babies get HIV. African Americans, whites, Hispanics, Asians, and people of other ethnic backgrounds get it. People with HIV live all across the country. Some are rich and famous, and some are poor and unknown.

Of those diagnosed in 2010,¹

- 64% were men who had sex with another man.
- 27% were heterosexual men and women.
- 8% were people who injected drugs.
- <1% were babies who got HIV from their mothers during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.
- 46% were African American.
- 29% were white.
- 20% were Hispanic.

Testing is the only way to know if you’re infected

The only way to find out if you have HIV is to be tested. The initial screening test uses either a blood sample or an oral fluid sample. If the initial test is positive, it is followed up with a confirmatory test.

How to keep from getting HIV

- Use a condom during sex.
- Limit the number of people you have sex with.
- Before having sex with a new partner, both of you should be tested for HIV.
- Get tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections; if you’re positive, get treated.
- Don’t use someone else’s razor, toothbrush, or other things that might have blood on them.
- If you get a piercing or tattoo, be sure a clean needle is used.
- Avoid alcohol and drug abuse; they impair your judgement and weaken your immune system.
- Don’t share needles and syringes if you inject drugs; find out about a needle-exchange program instead.
- Get circumcised; male circumcision helps reduce HIV transmission from women to the circumcised male.
- Consider taking preventive medication if you’re at high risk of being infected.
- If you know you’ve been exposed to HIV, consider taking HIV drugs as soon as possible after the exposure.
Knowing if you have HIV is very important. Treatment can fight the virus and help keep your immune system strong. But, you can’t be treated if you don’t know you’re infected. And, you won’t know if you’re infected unless you get tested.

**HIV testing options**

There are 4 basic options for HIV screening:

1. A doctor orders the test and tells the patient where to go to have the sample collected. The sample is sent to a laboratory. The laboratory tests the sample and confirms any positive results. The laboratory sends the result back to the doctor.

2. A rapid test is done at the doctor’s office or at a clinic. If it’s positive, a sample has to be sent to a laboratory for confirmation. The final result is returned to the doctor or clinic.

3. The patient collects a blood sample at home (finger stick) and sends it to a laboratory. The laboratory tests the sample, confirming positive results. The patient calls a toll-free number to get his/her results.

4. The patient buys an over-the-counter test kit. The patient collects an oral fluid sample, runs the test, and reads the test results in the privacy of his/her home. Positive results MUST be confirmed with another test performed at a medical facility.

**What are the current testing recommendations?**

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) currently recommends HIV screening for pregnant women and people at high risk of HIV. But, most experts think HIV screening should be widespread. It shouldn’t be limited to those who are at high risk. Thus, in November 2012, the USPSTF drafted new recommendations which would recommend screening:

- All adolescents and adults 15-65 years old
- Younger and older people who are at high risk
- All pregnant women including those whose HIV status is unknown at time of labor.

A decision on whether to adopt the draft recommendations may be out soon.

**Why are the USPSTF recommendations important?**

The USPSTF recommendations determine when HIV screening is covered under the Affordable Care Act. According to the Act, insurance companies have to provide USPSTF recommended services without cost-sharing. This means the insurance company pays the full cost. The patient doesn’t have to pay anything.