



# A resource guide on Antenatal HIV testing policy



One of the major breakthroughs in controlling the spread of HIV has been in reducing the risk of mother to child transmission. The use of anti-retroviral treatments can reduce the rate of perinatal HIV transmission by up to 70 per cent; the risk may be further reduced by certain labour-management techniques, and by avoiding breastfeeding.

The Department of Health recommends that information about the HIV test is offered to all pregnant women, and that testing is available in all antenatal clinics. In areas of high prevalence, HIV testing should be offered to all pregnant women as early as possible in pregnancy, and should be performed following pre-test discussion and with the woman's consent.

The Department's current guidelines were considered in a report by a joint working party representing the main Royal Colleges concerned with maternity care. It urged that antenatal units in high HIV prevalence areas routinely offer and *recommend* voluntary confidential HIV testing to all pregnant women as an integral part of their antenatal care (Intercollegiate Working Party).

With around 70 per cent of HIV infections in pregnant women remaining undiagnosed at the time of delivery in the UK, there is concern that many women are missing out on these risk-reducing interventions, and also on opportunities of more effective treatment for themselves. New ways of offering antenatal testing to pregnant women which might increase uptake are being researched and implemented.

## Published reports

Department of Health. *Guidelines for offering voluntary named HIV anti-body testing to women receiving ante-natal care*. London: DoH, 1994. PL/CO (94)3.

Available from Miss Ruth Hickson, Communicable Diseases Branch, Health Promotion Division of the Department of Health, 133-155 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8UG.  
Fax: 0171 972 4354.

Department of Health. *Guidelines for pre-test discussion on HIV testing*. London: DoH, 1996.  
Available from Miss Hickson as above.

Department of Health. *HIV/AIDS strategy conference report*. London: DoH, 1998.  
Available from Mrs Kabarria as above. Includes a summary report of the antenatal testing workshop.

Inner London HIV Health Commissioners' Group. *Quality framework for HIV antenatal testing services in London*. London: ILHHCG, 1998.  
Available from Cora Castle, Centre for Research on Drugs and Health Behaviour, 200 Seagrave Place, London SW6 1RQ. Tel: 0181 846 6566; fax: 0171 846 6555.

Intercollegiate Working Party for Enhancing Voluntary Confidential HIV Testing in Pregnancy. *Reducing mother to child transmission of HIV infection in the United Kingdom. Recommendations of an Intercollegiate Working Party for Enhancing Voluntary Confidential HIV Testing in Pregnancy.*

London: Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, 1998.

Available from RCPCH, 50 Hallam Street, London W1N 6DE. Tel: 0171 307 5600; fax: 0171 307 5601.

Royal College of Midwives. *RCM Position Paper 16a HIV & AIDS* Oct 1998. London: RCM, 1998.

A limited number of inspection copies are available from the Policy Department, RCM, 15 Mansfield Street, London W1H 0BE. Additional copies are available (price £1.00) from RCM, Welsh Board, 4 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF1 9LJ. Tel: 01222 228 111; fax: 01222 228 333.

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. *HIV infection in maternity care and gynaecology. Working party report.* London: RCOG Press, March 1997.

Available from RCOG, 27 Sussex Place, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RG. Tel: 0171 772 6200; fax: 0171 723 0575.

United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. *Registrar's Letter 4/1994, Annex 1: Acquired immune deficiency syndrome and human immunodeficiency virus infection, (HIV and AIDS infection), Annex 2: Anonymous testing for the prevalence of the human immunodeficiency virus, (HIV).* London: UKCC, March 1994.

Available from UKCC, 23 Portland Place, London W1N 4JT. Tel: 0171 637 7181.

Unlinked Anonymous HIV Surveys Steering Group. *Unlinked anonymous HIV prevalence monitoring programme: England and Wales, data to end of 1997.* London: Department of Health, December 1998.

Available from Mrs P Gardiner, Communicable Diseases Branch, Health Promotion Division of the Department of Health, 133-155 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8UG. Fax: 0171 972 4354.

*British Medical Journal* 1998 (Jan 24) 316: various pages. This issue has a series of articles examining research and practice in relation to antenatal HIV testing.

Cafferkey M *et al.* Screening for HIV-1 in pregnancy. [Corres] *British Med. J.* 1998 (20 Jun) 351: 1893-4.

Dennison B *et al.* Feasibility of named antenatal HIV screening in an inner city population. *AIDS Care* 1998 10 (3): 259-65.

Grant J and Roth C. Antenatal HIV testing: time for a change in practice. *The Practising Midwife* 1998 1 (5): 16-19.

Johnstone F *et al.* A randomised control trial of different approaches to universal antenatal HIV testing: uptake and acceptability. *HTA Monograph* 1999 3 (5). Available from Sarah Clements, NHS R & D Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Programme in April/May 1999. Tel: 01703 595 586; fax: 01703 595 639; web: www.soton.ac.uk/~hta. (*in press* - this will be free to NHS workers and Sarah would prefer requests in writing).

Levy L. Ethics and strategies for discussing antenatal testing in a practice setting. *Practice Nursing* 1999 (Mar) 10 (4). (*in press*)

Nicoll A. Antenatal screening for HIV in the UK: what is to be done? *J of Medical Screening* 1999 5 (4): 170-1.

Simpson W *et al.* Antenatal HIV testing: assessment of a voluntary routine approach. *British Med J* 1999. (*in press*)

Tookey P *et al.* Performance of antenatal HIV screening strategies in the UK. *J of Medical Screening* 1998 5: 133-6. (Correction in *J of Medical Screening* 1998 5: 214)

## Educational resources

- *Better for your baby: HIV testing as part of your antenatal care* [PL/CO(98)4], produced by the Expert Advisory Group on AIDS. This is a new Department of Health leaflet being distributed to all pregnant women in Greater London which recommends HIV testing. Available from Department of Health, PO Box 410 Wetherby LS23 7LN. Fax: 0990 210 266.
- *HIV testing in pregnancy: helping women choose* is a booklet aimed at midwives, and complements the Department of Health leaflet mentioned above. The Royal College of Midwives, who produced this booklet on behalf of the Department of Health, will be running a series of seminars for London midwives on antenatal HIV testing and related topics. The booklet emphasises current Departmental policy and the findings of the Intercollegiate Working Party (see above). The RCM has recently disseminated the booklet to all midwives in London, and to Heads of Midwifery and midwifery educationalists in England. Additional copies are available from the Policy Department, Royal College of Midwives, 15 Mansfield Street, London W1M 0BE.
- *Baby matters: HIV, pregnancy and childbearing issues for African women* is a booklet available from the Terrence Higgins Trust, 52–54 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8JU. Tel: 0171 831 0330; e-mail: info@ttht.org.uk; web: www.ttht.org.uk.
- *Information for women with HIV: HIV, pregnancy and your baby* and *Management of HIV in pregnancy and the first year of life* by Dr Jan Welch. Available from Dr Welch, Caldecot Centre, King's Healthcare NHS Trust, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS, in English and French. Also available in four African languages (Luganda, Bemba, Luo and Kishwaili) from Vanguard, 26b Thames House, South Bank Commercial Centre, 140 Battersea Park Road, London SW11 4NB. Tel: 0171 627 5170; e-mail: vanguard@dircon.co.uk.
- *The HIV test* booklet for pregnant women is available from AVERT, 4 Brighton Road, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 5BA. Tel: 01403 210 202; e-mail: avert@didal.pipex.com; web: www.avert.org.uk

## Selected websites

- AVERT – [www.avert.org.uk](http://www.avert.org.uk)
- Department of Health – [www.doh.gov.uk](http://www.doh.gov.uk)
- English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting (ENB) – [www.enb.org.uk](http://www.enb.org.uk)
- Institute of Child Health, Epidemiology and Public Health Unit, The Antenatal Screening Project – [www.ich.bpmf.ac.uk/units/epiedit.htm](http://www.ich.bpmf.ac.uk/units/epiedit.htm)
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists – [www.rcog.org.uk](http://www.rcog.org.uk)
- Terrence Higgins Trust – [www.ttht.org.uk](http://www.ttht.org.uk)

## Useful contacts for further information

- Daisy Byaruhanga, Chair, Innovative Vision Organisation (IVO), 123 High Cross Road, Tottenham Hale, London N17 9NR. Tel: 0181 365 0349; fax: 0181 365 1477. Daisy is available to advise on antenatal HIV testing policy issues as they relate to Zambians, Ugandans, Zimbabweans and Congolese. Daisy can also arrange for African women to participate in midwife training events.
- Diana Gibb, MRC Clinical Trials Unit, Mortimer Market Centre, off Capper Street, London WC1E 6AU. Tel: 0171 380 9991; e-mail: d.gibb@ctu.mrc.ac.uk. A multi-site evaluation of the antenatal HIV testing programme commenced in April 1995, based at the Institute of Child Health. Areas included: surveys of UK testing practice; uptake of testing in London; and an economic analysis of testing policy in London and the rest of the UK. Various articles have been published (see published reports and websites above, or ask NHPIS for a complete listing). Diana intends to publish the full report in due course.

- Barbara Hamilton, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Centre for Reproductive Biology, The University of Edinburgh, 37 Chalmers Street, Edinburgh EH3 9EW. In 1997, the MRC Medical Sociology Unit completed a randomised controlled trial into different approaches to offering universal antenatal HIV testing. The researchers have published some interim papers (see Simpson, above) in advance of the final report (see Johnstone, above).
- Jane Kennedy, Midwife/HIV Counsellor, Guy's & St Thomas' Hospitals NHS Trust, St Thomas' Hospital Antenatal Clinic, 3rd Floor, Lambeth Wing, London SE1 7EH. Tel: 0171 928 9292 x3637; fax: 0171 922 8351. Antenatal HIV testing is universally recommended to all pregnant women attending. Written information has been translated into French, Portuguese, Italian, Vietnamese and English. Jane is also the contact for the Maternity HIV Forum (MHF), a London-wide group of counsellors and specialist midwives. You may contact Jane for a list of midwives/counsellors involved in HIV infection and pregnancy issues.
- Danielle Mercey, Senior Lecturer and Honorary Consultant in Genito-Urinary Medicine, Mortimer Market Centre, off Capper Street, London, WC1E 6AU. Tel: 0171 380 9946; e-mail: dmercey@gum.ucl.ac.uk. Danielle has a special interest in the care of HIV positive women. She helped establish the first universal antenatal testing programme in London, and conducted and published an evaluation of this.
- The National HIV Prevention Information Service (NHPIS) provides comprehensive and authoritative information on HIV and its prevention, including project details and current research into antenatal testing policy and practice from our Research and Practice/Interests Database (RAPID) – see below.
- Royal College of Midwives, 15 Mansfield Street, London W1M 0BE. Tel: 0171 312 3535.
- Judith Sunderland, HIV Specialist Midwife, Newham Healthcare NHS Trust, Antenatal Clinic, Newham General Hospital, Glen Road, London E13 8RU. Tel: 0171 363 8010. The maternity service recommends HIV testing to all women as part of antenatal care. A leaflet has been produced that gives information about all blood tests that are recommended in pregnancy, including the HIV test.
- Cecilia Ward, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Imperial College School of Medicine (St.Mary's), Norfolk Place, London W2 1PG; e-mail: c.ward@ic.ac.uk.

## Watch out for.....

- Following publication of the Intercollegiate Working Party's report (see above), the Inner London HIV Health Commissioners' Group has commissioned a scoping study to examine current policy and practice on HIV antenatal testing in London's 31 obstetric units. An internal report, including guidelines to support the Working Party's recommendations, is planned for April 1999, with wider dissemination likely to follow. The study will include guidelines on writing antenatal HIV leaflets. For further details contact Jane Carrier, Centre for Research on Drugs and Health Behaviour, 200 Seagrave Place, London SW6 1RQ. Tel: 0181 846 6566; fax: 0171 846 6555.
- The forthcoming Department of Health Strategy on HIV and AIDS is likely to include antenatal HIV testing. A consultation document is planned for dissemination by summer 1999.



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ISBN 07521 1587 1

National HIV Prevention Information Service

# NHPIS

NHPIS resource guides are designed to alert interested health and education professionals to the key resources required for developing HIV health promotion in a given area.

NHPIS is a free specialist information service on HIV health promotion for professionals in England. It is funded by the Department of Health and based at the Health Education Authority, 30 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2HW.

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