



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *HIV Testing: It Helps to Know*

#### *Routine Rapid HIV Testing in Emergency Departments*

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*[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly broadcast of the MMWR, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Matthew Reynolds. In the United States, approximately one million people are living with HIV. Of those, nearly a quarter – that's about 250,000 people - don't know they are infected. When people get tested for HIV and find out they are infected, they can benefit from earlier access to life-saving treatment, and can take steps to reduce the risk of infecting their partners. Dr. Jeff Schulden, a research physician with CDC's HIV/AIDS prevention program, is one of the authors of a recently published study that looked at the results of routinely offering HIV testing to persons seeking care in hospital emergency departments. He's here to tell us more about the study's findings. Welcome to the show, Dr. Schulden.

**[Dr. Schulden]** Thanks for having me.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Dr. Schulden, tell us more about this study and what you learned.

**[Dr. Schulden]** In these demonstration projects, we worked with three hospitals in New York City, Los Angeles, and Oakland, California to offer HIV testing routinely to people seeking care in their emergency departments. We showed that routinely providing HIV testing in emergency departments is feasible and effective in helping people learn their HIV status, especially those with limited access to health services. In these three emergency departments, the majority of the more than 34,000 people offered HIV testing agreed to be tested. Over 9,000 individuals received rapid HIV tests and of those, approximately 1% were newly identified as HIV positive. All those newly diagnosed with HIV were referred to care and at least 88 percent were actually linked to medical follow up care.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Why did you choose emergency departments for these projects?

**[Dr. Schulden]** Emergency departments are a vital link to populations at high risk for HIV. They are often the first and only line of health care for many people with undiagnosed HIV infection.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** What are the recommendations for offering an HIV test and how is this different from past recommendations?

**[Dr. Schulden]** Last year, in 2006, CDC announced new HIV testing recommendations for health care settings. The goal of these recommendations is to make HIV testing a standard, routine part of medical care for all persons between the ages of 13 and 64, and for all pregnant women, regardless of perceived risk of HIV. The previous HIV testing recommendations for health care settings focused on those at perceived high risk for HIV and those receiving care in high HIV prevalence areas. In practice, with the old recommendations, patients were often visiting health care facilities without being offered an HIV test. The new recommendations are much more straight forward, stating that everyone between the ages of 13 and 64 should be tested, regardless of perceived risk.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** I recall reading in the past that a person who got HIV testing would have to go to the clinic get tested and then return to find out the results. Has that changed?

**[Dr. Schulden]** It has. You're right. With conventional HIV testing, it could sometimes take anywhere from several days to up to two weeks for a person to receive their HIV test results. Generally, a person would have to return to the facility where they had received the test to get the results. In addition, with conventional HIV testing, generally, they were performed using a blood sample which was taken with a needle. Now, with rapid HIV testing, which were used in these projects, people can receive their HIV test results in as little as 10 to 20 minutes, which means that in the same visit, in one visit where a person receives the test, they actually also get the test result. With a person not having to return to get the test results, it means that we as health care providers can better ensure that people actually get their HIV test result. The other advantage to rapid HIV testing is that they can be performed using finger prick blood or a oral swab of the mouth, so they're much easier to perform and they're much more acceptable to people who might not like needles.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Given the relative ease of testing then that you just described, why wouldn't some people get tested for HIV?

**[Dr. Schulden]** Some of the reasons which people report for not getting HIV tested include not having access to HIV testing services or not knowing where to get a test, not having time for an HIV test, or thinking that they don't need to get an HIV test. The new recommendations will make HIV testing much more widely available across health care settings and make it much more straight forward for people to receive an HIV test. We also hope that by health care providers recommending that all people between the ages of 13 and 64 receive an HIV test, it will further reduce the stigma and fear around HIV - another commonly reported barrier to testing.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Let's say that people take this HIV test and find out that they are infected. What actions would you hope they would take?

**[Dr. Schulden]** By diagnosing people earlier, we can link those who have HIV to care and treatment earlier in the course of their infection. We now have excellent treatments

for people with HIV, allowing them to live long and healthy lives. The earlier people are diagnosed with HIV and enrolled in care and treatment, the better their chances of staying healthy longer. In addition, we know that individuals who are aware that they are HIV infected are more likely to take steps to protect their partners from getting HIV. As you mentioned earlier, it's estimated that up to one quarter of the more than one million people currently living with HIV in the U.S. are not aware of their HIV infection.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Besides emergency departments, are there other places where people can get an HIV test?

**[Dr. Schulden]** In terms of other clinical settings, we recommend that all health care facilities offer HIV testing services to patients. This would not only include emergency departments, but also primary care clinics, community clinics, in-patient facilities of hospitals, and urgent care clinics. In addition to health care facilities, many communities also have specific HIV voluntary testing and counseling centers where HIV testing is available. These are often run by local HIV service organizations or community based organizations.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** If HIV testing is done more often, do you think that that will have an effect on people's attitudes towards being tested?

**[Dr. Schulden]** Yes. By recommending HIV testing as a routine part of health care for everyone between the ages of 13 and 64, we can help further reduce the stigma of this disease. When health care providers offer this test to everyone, it acknowledges that this is a disease which affects all communities and can affect all people. In addition, CDC has more information about HIV, AIDS, and HIV testing on the CDC web site at [www.cdc.gov/hiv](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv), and you can also learn more by calling the CDC information hotline toll free at 1-800-CDC-INFO.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today Dr. Schulden.

**[Dr. Schulden]** Thanks for having me.

**[Matthew Reynolds]** Well, that's it for this week's show. Don't forget to join us next week. Until then, be well. This is Matthew Reynolds for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

*[Announcer] To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family and your community, please visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*