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Philadelphia County – 215-685-6585

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York – 717-849-2299

Northcentral District Office – 570-327-3400

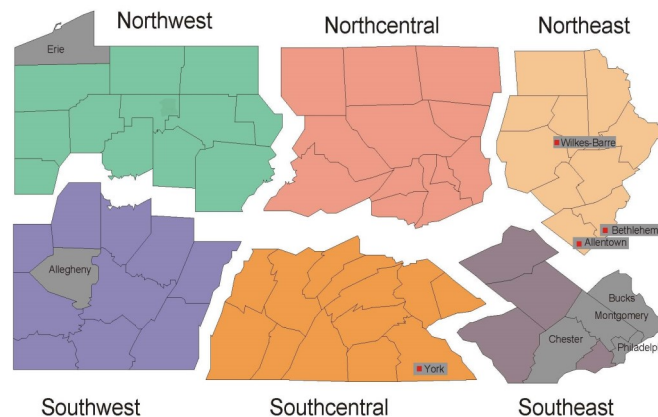
Northeast District Office – 570-826-2062

Northwest District Office – 724-662-6068

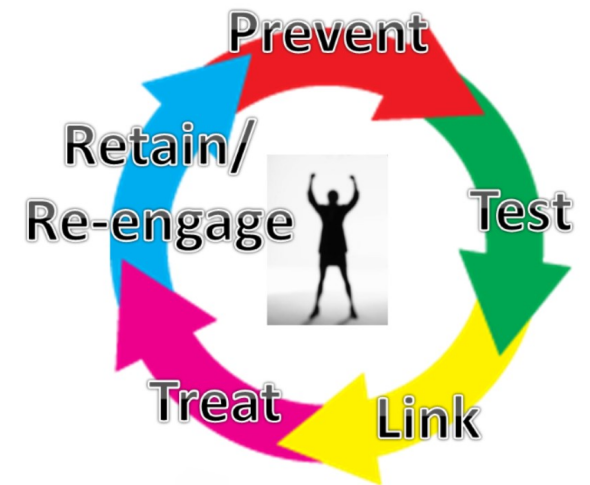
Southcentral District Office – 717-787-8092

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Partner Services: The role of the health care provider



Overview of Partner Services

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines partner services as a collection of services offered to patients with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) – syphilis, HIV, chlamydia, or gonorrhea – and offered to their partners as well.

Partner services works best when the health care provider is involved. The state or local health department is available to assist providers with interviewing patients, and locating and notifying partners to offer them the appropriate testing and related services.



What are partner services?

Individuals infected with syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea, or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) can unknowingly continue to spread the infection to others. Partner services (PS) is a proven evidence-based public health intervention that can help break the chain of infection.

PS is a free, confidential and voluntary program conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Health (Department) and county/municipal health departments (CMHD) to help people diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or HIV plan how to best notify their sexual and/or needle-sharing partners of an exposure to an STD/HIV and link them to testing.

- ◆ PS staff can assist health care providers with techniques on how to quickly and effectively communicate the importance of PS referral to their patients.
- ◆ PS staff will work with each patient to identify sexual partners and/or needle-sharing partners and will develop a plan to notify each partner while protecting the patient's identity.
- ◆ PS staff can also help patients who choose to notify their partners themselves.
- ◆ PS can be initiated by direct referral from a health care provider or through disease reporting.

What is the role of the health care provider?

It is the shared responsibility of health care providers to prevent further spread of STDs and HIV infection. The relationship between health care providers and their patients is critical in helping to identify sexual and needle-sharing partners. Medical providers, test counselors and other health care professionals play a key role in PS by informing patients of the value and importance of PS. Presenting PS in a positive light will help your patients and their partners prevent new infections and reinfections and save lives. Health care providers should contact health department PS staff to arrange a meeting with the patient. While active health department involvement in providing PS is recommended, PS staff will also notify partners elicited by health care providers to prevent the further spread of infection.

Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality is paramount to any relationship between a patient, the provider, and any potential partners. The Confidentiality of HIV-Related Information Act (35 P.S. § 7601 et seq.) [Act 148] protects individuals from disclosure and subsequent misuse of HIV-related information. The Department is forbidden by law to release any information it obtains while carrying out PS, except in certain very limited circumstances.

A physician may notify known partners, without health department involvement, if all the following conditions are met: 1) the disclosure is made to a known contact of the subject; 2) the physician believes disclosure is medically appropriate and there is a significant risk of future infection to the contact; 3) the physician has counseled the patient regarding the need to notify the partner and reasonably believes the patient will not inform the partner or abstain from sexual or needle-sharing behavior with the partner; and 4) the physician has informed the patient of his intent to make such notification. The physician shall not disclose the identity of the patient or any other contact.

Guidelines for Minors

A minor may give consent for medical and health services to determine the presence of, or to treat, pregnancy and venereal disease and other diseases reportable under the Disease Prevention and Control Law, including HIV and STDs, without anyone else's consent. However, under the Child Protective Services Law (CPSL), as recently amended, it may be mandatory for some providers of care to report suspected child abuse. Providers should contact their legal counsel to determine actions needed with respect to the CPSL. Please contact the Department of Human Services if you have any questions relating to the CPSL or responsibilities under the law.