



Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

5600 Fishers Lane • Rockville, MD 20857
www.samhsa.gov • 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)



November 21, 2019

Dear Colleague:

As Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use, I urge the public health and substance use disorder treatment communities to take action to address the treatment and prevention of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates there are about 1.1 million people living with HIV in the United States. Of those, 51 percent are on antiretroviral treatment and have reached viral suppression. The remaining 49 percent are either undiagnosed, lost to follow-up, or in care, but have not achieved viral suppression.¹ HIV remains one of the top 10 leading causes of death in the U.S. for people aged 25-44.

The intersection of substance misuse, mental disorders, and HIV is evident. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) National Survey on Drug Use and Health report that people living with HIV were two times more likely to have a substance use disorder than the general population.³ In this critical juncture of the HIV and Opioid epidemics, substance use disorder treatment programs play a crucial role in ensuring those who are HIV negative remain negative, and those who are HIV positive are tested, linked to treatment, and able to remain adherent to ARV treatment. According to the National Survey of Substance Abuse Treatment Services, only 29 percent of the nearly 15,000 substance use disorder treatment facilities completing the survey reported doing any HIV testing. This is simply unacceptable; our nation deserves better from our field.

Given the introduction of new, easier forms of HIV testing, there is no reason that all substance use disorder treatment providers cannot administer HIV testing on-site. Oral fluid testing represents a significant opportunity to increase HIV testing. All substance use disorder treatment programs should include on-site, same-day oral fluid HIV testing into their standards of care.

When engaging clients at either intake or during follow-up, it is critical to assess risk behaviors associated with HIV transmission. Oral fluid HIV testing provides rapid results in 20 minutes, using a swab to collect an oral fluid sample. Test kits are widely available, and are ideal in community and clinic testing programs. SAMHSA encourages programs not currently doing HIV testing on-site to integrate HIV pre and post-test counseling and oral fluid rapid HIV tests and to make this a routine component of substance use disorder treatment.

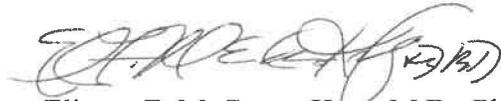
1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2017) HIV in the United States and Dependent Areas. <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/statistics/overview/ataglance.html>

2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2018). National Survey on Substance Abuse Treatment Services.

The CDC recommends that everyone aged 15-64 be tested at least once for HIV, with more frequent re-testing for individuals at higher risk for HIV. Substance misuse is often associated with high-risk sexual behavior as well as injection drug use.

The field is uniquely positioned to ensure HIV testing, counseling, and education services reach clients in need across the nation. It is not solely my desire for this to happen; it is in fact our collective responsibility. Given the rate at which families and communities are losing their loved ones, inaction is not an acceptable answer. A simple and effective means of testing is now available to all who are willing to use it in their programs. The use of these tests is a simple step we can collectively take which can yield a potential benefit for thousands of Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. McCance-Katz', with a date '(12/12)' written to the right of the signature.

Elinore F. McCance-Katz, M.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and
Substance Use

3. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2018). National Survey on Drug Use and Health