

## New Jersey AIDS/HIV/STD Hotline

### **PRESS RELEASE**

March 2023

### **Ageism and HIV Stigma Are Barriers to Ending HIV in Adults 55 and Older**

(New Jersey) – As we continue to work towards the goal of ending HIV in NJ by 2025, it is important for all people, including adults 55 and older, to know their HIV and STI (sexually transmitted infections) status. Recent [data](#) in New Jersey shows an increase in cases of new HIV/AIDS infections among virtually all age groups in 2021, including adults 55 and older.

Similar to other groups at highest risk of HIV, older adults with HIV face discrimination, often referred to as ageism. Many people including some medical providers believe older adults are not at risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections because they aren't having sex. This is simply not true. Many older adults have active sex lives, but lack sexual health education to protect themselves and their partners. They're unaware of their risk of infection and the options available for prevention, testing, and treatment.

Testing is an important step in reducing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in all groups, including older adults. Everyone who is sexually active and/or uses drugs regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender identity, sexual identity, or sexual orientation should get tested regularly for HIV and STIs, even if a person doesn't have symptoms. Testing is the only way to be sure of HIV/STI infection. It is not only important for a person to know their own HIV/STI status, but also the status of their sex partner(s).

Although aging adults visit their medical providers more often, they may feel more stigmatized and uncomfortable/embarrassed talking about their sexual health with their provider. Medical providers are also less likely to test older adults for HIV and STIs and ask about their current or past drug use and sexual risk behaviors. Having a sexually transmitted infection puts a person more at risk for getting HIV.

Breaking stigmas around aging, drug use, and sexual activities will encourage open and honest conversations between patients and their medical providers. Negative attitudes and stereotypes keep people at risk for HIV and people living with HIV from accessing important sexual health information and testing, treatment, and prevention services.

Older adults have many of the same sexual risk behaviors as young people. Like young people, they are less likely to use condoms while engaging in sexual activities because they underestimate their risk of infection. Some [sexual activities](#) and preferences carry a higher risk for both HIV and STIs than others. HIV and STIs can be prevented. There are many ways a person can make sex safer.

Adults over 55 should talk to their medical providers about proven prevention options like [PrEP \(pre-exposure prophylaxis\)](#) and [PEP \(post-exposure prophylaxis\)](#) to reduce new HIV infections. Medical providers need to educate older adults on the importance of using latex condom with PrEP to prevent getting STIs.

It's common for a person to pass HIV and other STIs to sex partners through sex or drug use without knowing it. Many older adults live with HIV for years before being diagnosed and starting [treatment](#). Although there is no cure, HIV can be managed by medication. Starting [treatment](#) with HIV medicines called antiretroviral therapy (ART) as soon as possible after diagnosis is key to lowering the amount of HIV in the body.

Treatment plans managed by HIV care providers can help people with HIV reach and maintain undetectable levels of HIV. There are many health benefits to keeping a low viral load (staying undetectable) — being healthy, having a strong immune system, not passing HIV to others, and a decreased risk of developing HIV-related illnesses. If HIV is not treated or if a person with HIV does not maintain an undetectable viral load, they can pass HIV to others and can develop AIDS.

Removing barriers to healthcare services for people most affected by HIV will have a positive impact on the health and lives of people in vulnerable communities. By maintaining an undetectable viral load, a person with HIV can expect to live as long as their peers and not pass HIV to others.

If you're experiencing side effects from medicines used to treat HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or are looking for free, sexual health services in New Jersey, contact the medical professionals at the NJ AIDS/HIV/STD Hotline: Call: 1-800-624-2377; [Chat Here](#)

## **Get Tested. Know Your Status. End HIV.**

New Jersey offers free HIV and other STI services to all state residents via the hotline. Knowing who to call for resources and information is the first step in ending the HIV epidemic in New Jersey. The hotline is staffed by health professionals (doctors, nurses, and pharmacists) available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to provide free, confidential help: Call: 1-800-624-2377 or [Chat Here](#)

- Referrals for testing, prevention, treatment, and other related services
- Prevention and treatment information for HIV, hepatitis, and other STIs (sexually transmitted infections)
- Information on the side effects of medicines used to treat HIV and other STIs
- Referrals to PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) services

- Counseling and treatment locations
- Referrals to harm reduction centers (syringe access available)
- Partner notification services
- New Jersey's AIDS Drug Distribution Program ([ADDP](#))

Connect with NJ AIDS/HIV/STD Hotline



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**New Jersey AIDS/HIV/STD Hotline**

Healthcare professionals (doctors, nurses and pharmacists) provide telephone consultation for people seeking information about HIV/AIDS, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and other sexually transmitted infections (STI) including hepatitis. Callers receive information tailored to their needs; discussion about prevention, referrals for testing sites and other related services, counseling and testing locations, and information on treatment and adverse reactions to medications. The hotline is administered by the New Jersey Poison Control Center and funded by the New Jersey Department of Health, Division of HIV, STD, and TB services.

**Rutgers New Jersey Medical School**

Founded in 1954, Rutgers New Jersey Medical School is the oldest school of medicine in the state. Today it is part of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and graduates approximately 170 physicians a year. In addition to providing the MD degree, the school offers MD/PhD, MD/MPH and MD/MBA degrees through collaborations with other institutions of higher education. Dedicated to excellence in education, research, clinical care and community outreach, the medical school comprises 20 academic departments and works with several healthcare partners, including its principal teaching hospital, University Hospital. Its faculty consists of numerous world-renowned scientists and many of the region's "top doctors." Home to the nation's oldest student-run clinic, New Jersey Medical School hosts more than 50 centers and institutes, including the Public Health Research Institute Center, the Global Tuberculosis Institute and the Neurological Institute of New Jersey. For more information please visit: [njms.rutgers.edu](http://njms.rutgers.edu).

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