

## APPENDIX A

### HARBORVIEW MEDICAL CENTER ENCOURAGES ALL PATIENTS TO BE SCREENED FOR HIV

HIV testing is voluntary and can be life-saving. This sheet describes HIV testing. It can help you decide whether or not to be tested.

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It is the virus that causes AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Sndrome), a serious disease that reduces the body's ability to fight certain infections. The infections and conditions associated with AIDS can be life threatening. All people infected with HIV can spread HIV to others by having unprotected sex, sharing needles and injection equipment, and/or donating blood or organs. Infected mothers can spread HIV to their babies.

Risk of HIV transmission can be decreased or eliminated through sexual abstinence, mutual monogamy with an uninfected partner, correct and consistent use of condoms and not sharing IV drugs or needles.

#### **How We Test for HIV; What the Tests Mean**

We first perform a test for HIV antibodies. Antibodies are the body's response to the virus. Reactive test results are confirmed by further tests. We may also test for the virus in your blood using a process that can find HIV sooner than the antibody test. This result may take up to one week to return.

A CONFIRMED POSITIVE test means that a person is infected with HIV and can infect others.

A Nonreactive test means there is no evidence of HIV infection. This usually means that the person does not have HIV. However, sometimes the infection may be too recent for the test to be reactive or confirmed positive. The current tests usually turn positive within one month of infection, sometimes longer. Therefore, if you were infected very recently, a nonreactive test result could be wrong.

If a test result is in question, additional tests can be performed to ensure accuracy.

#### **Benefits of Being Tested**

There are important benefits to being tested and knowing your results. Many people with HIV will benefit from medicines that prevent AIDS and other illnesses. Tests can help to decide the best treatments to use. Also, test results can help people make choices about birth control and pregnancy. Although everyone should follow safer sex guidelines, many people find that knowing their test results helps them to protect their partners and themselves. Some people want to know their test results before starting a new sexual relationship or becoming pregnant. Most people will feel better by learning that they do not have HIV.

## **Risks and Disadvantages of Being Tested**

Some people may feel stressed or depressed before, during or after HIV testing. This is especially true when there is a positive result. Some people with negative tests may continue or increase their risks for HIV infection. They may worry less about having unprotected sex or sharing needles and/or injection equipment – and then get infected. Some people are afraid that their test results will get into the wrong hands, leading to discrimination. You should think about your support, including family and friends, and your insurance needs before you are tested.

## **Privacy and Confidentiality**

Washington State law requires care providers and laboratories to report the names of HIV-infected persons to the local health department for disease monitoring. The confidentiality of HIV testing records is strongly protected by law. Penalties for violations of the law are severe.

## **Getting Test Results & Notifying Partners**

In some cases, you may be able to get your result by phone. If your result is positive, you will be asked to return for in-person assistance. If you test positive and do not call or return for the result, we will try to contact you. If we are unable to do so, we will ask the local Public Health Office to contact you to ensure that you know your results and can arrange for care. It is very important that you learn the results of your test. If your test is positive, medical attention can be very beneficial. If your test is positive, the people with whom you have had sex or shared needles or other injection equipment need to be told that they should be tested for HIV. Public Health may contact you to ensure that your partners are notified. They can tell partners for you without sharing your name. If your test is NOT positive, you may choose to take steps to reduce future risk.