

To: All Chief Executives of Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities in England

From: Sir Liam Donaldson – Chief Medical Officer – Department of Health

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Category: **URGENT**

Title: **Improving the Prevention and Treatment of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including HIV.**

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to update you on some of the elements of clinical good practice on sexual health and, in particular, the more serious sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV. I would be grateful if you could bring this advice to the attention of your relevant management colleagues, clinical and public health teams so they can take any necessary action to safeguard the health of your local population.

Good practice standards in relation to both sexual health and HIV services have been published^{1,2}. In addition, *The NHS in England: the operating framework for 2006/07*³, prioritises action on sexual health and access to genito-urinary medicine (GUM) services, so that by 2008 everyone should be able to have an appointment within 48 hours. Building on this good practice and improving access to sexual health services has particular benefits for HIV prevention.

As well as general prevention work, it is important also to consider post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) which can prevent HIV transmission taking place after non-occupational exposure to HIV. PEP is an emergency treatment,

and to be effective in preventing HIV, it must be prescribed as soon as possible after potential exposure to the virus. After 72 hours it is unlikely to be effective. The British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) has recently published new clinical guidelines, including those for risk assessment, on prescribing PEP following non-occupational exposure⁴.

Recommended standards also includes guidance on the provision of PEP after non-occupational HIV exposure^{1,2}.

I would therefore ask you to ensure that PEP is part of the spectrum of sexual health services for your local populations. Provision of PEP for non-occupational exposure is not a replacement for evidence-based HIV health promotion, but it can have a contribution to make in preventing transmission of HIV.



**SIR LIAM DONALDSON
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER**

1. *Recommended Standards for NHS HIV Services* (2003) produced by the Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health
<http://www.medfash.org.uk/publications/current.html>
2. *Recommended Sexual Health Standards* (2005), produced by the Medical Foundation for AIDS and Sexual Health
3. The NHS in England: The operating framework for 2006/7

http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4127117&chk=BgsIVK

4. United Kingdom Guideline for the use of post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV following sexual exposure (BASHH) 2006