

March 1, 2024

## **Public Health Alert – HIV update**

### **Situation**

Prior to 2021 the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) incidence rate for the Northwestern Health Unit (NWHU) catchment area had generally been lower than that of the province of Ontario; 4.1 per 100,000 in NWHU (2013-2021) compared to 5-6 per 100,000 in Ontario (2012-2022).

NWHU incidence rates for 2022 and 2023 were 12.3 per 100,000 and 23.3 per 100,000 respectively. The incident rate in 2022 was a 10-year high for the region, and that rate nearly doubled in 2023. Although the increase in incidence rate mainly affects Kenora there is increased risk for other communities.

The [main risk factors](#) are drug use, homeless/underhoused, sharing drug use equipment, and not using condoms.

### **Actions for health care providers**

- Educate clients on prevention
- Encourage testing when indicated
- Gather detailed information on the best way to contact the case and those exposed for all STBBIs
- Consider PrEP and PEP
- Facilitate treatment

### **Additional information/support for health care providers**

#### Testing

- Point of Care (POC) testing is available at the NWHU
- NWHU can support other health care agencies in setting up point of care testing
- Visit [HIV Testing Ontario](#) for the Ontario Guidelines for Providers Offering HIV testing, including getting set up to receive POC test kits free of charge
- Further information and guidance are available in Public Health Agency of Canada's [HIV Screening and Testing Guide](#)



## Treatment

- [Ontario HIV Treatment Network](#)
- [Ontario Guidelines for Providers offering HIV Testing – HIV Testing Ontario](#)
- [Effectiveness, uptake and delivery of non-occupational HIV post-exposure prophylaxis \(PEP\) – Ontario HIV Treatment Network](#)
- [HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis \(PrEP\) in Ontario, 2021 – The Ontario HIV Treatment Network](#)

**Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)** is indicated for those who are not yet infected but have ongoing risk. [Canadian guideline](#) on PrEP use indications include:

- **People who inject drugs if they share injection drug use equipment with a person with non-negligible risk of HIV infection**
- Men who have sex with men who report condomless anal sex within the last 6 months and who have:
  - Infectious syphilis
  - Recurrent use of nonoccupational postexposure prophylaxis (more than one use)
  - Ongoing sexual relationship with an HIV positive partner with risk of transmissible HIV
  - Other high risk criteria
- Heterosexual, condomless vaginal or anal sex where HIV positive partner has risk of transmissible HIV

**Non-occupational post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)** is indicated for individuals in emergency situations and is not intended for regular use. PEP can be considered when there is greater than a negligible to low risk of HIV acquisition. Further detail can be found at [this source](#).

Additional treatment resources:

- <https://www.ohtn.on.ca/rapid-response-awareness-accessibility-and-uptake-of-pre-exposure-prophylaxis-among-cisgender-and-transgender-women-at-risk-of-hiv-infection/>
- <https://www.ohtn.on.ca/prep-for-cisgender-women-a-guide-for-healthcare-providers/>



**Northwestern  
Health Unit**

[www.nwhu.on.ca](http://www.nwhu.on.ca)

### Prevention

- Harm reduction supplies including single-use needles are key, given the risk factors specific to NWHU area
- Condoms, dental dams, and substance use harm reduction supplies are available free of charge at NWHU

### **Contact**

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