

## Factsheet GPs and primary care

### Key points

- Many GPs offer services which are not available at your HIV clinic.
- To access a GP you must be registered as their patient.
- You don't have to tell your GP that you have HIV but there are some good reasons to.



This factsheet highlights the contribution which general practice doctors (usually called GPs or family doctors), and other NHS services termed 'primary care services' can make to the care of people with HIV.

Even though people with HIV receive their HIV care from specialist HIV clinics, it is still important to have a GP. Firstly, many GPs offer services which are not available at your HIV clinic, but which you may need from time to time, such as health visiting for women who have recently had a baby; community nurses, if you need nursing support at home; mental health nursing; physiotherapy; and chiropody.

GPs are experienced in the prevention and management of many long-term conditions, including some that are common in people with HIV as they get older. These include high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

*"Knowing that you are taking HIV treatment will enable your GP to consider potentially harmful interactions with other medications."*

GPs are able to provide prescriptions for non-HIV medicines which your clinic may be unable to supply. Also, GPs are the only doctors who can make home visits if you are too ill to attend your HIV clinic or your GP's surgery. If you are unwell outside normal working hours, or at the weekend or bank holidays, all GPs have an emergency service, whereby a nurse or doctor will offer advice and, if necessary, visit you at home. If the problem requires hospital care, they can

arrange for your admission into hospital and will normally be willing to speak to the on-call HIV doctor at your clinic to arrange specialist HIV care if appropriate.

## Registering with a GP

To access a GP you must be registered as their patient. You can only be registered with one GP and you must live within the area the GP practises in. When you register, you will be asked to give your name and address, your NHS number and details of your last GP. Don't worry if you can't find your NHS number, you can still register without it.

**Some HIV clinics keep a list of GPs, and may be able to recommend a GP with experience of caring for people with HIV.**

However, GPs sometimes cannot accept any more patients as they have the maximum number of people registered with them. You can search for GPs (and other health services) in your area on the NHS website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk))

GPs cannot refuse to register you because you have HIV or any other medical condition, because of your race or sexuality, because you cannot provide a proof of address, or because you cannot provide a proof of identity. If you have problems registering with a GP practice, contact [Doctors of the World](#) for advice on 0808 1647 686.

If you need a GP when you are away from home, then you can register as a 'temporary resident' if you will be within their practice area for 14 days or less.

If you are entitled to free NHS treatment then all NHS services provided by your GP will be free. GPs also provide some other services for a fee, such as signing passport applications.

Most GPs have an appointment system, and sometimes these become booked up days in advance. Emergency appointments will usually be available for people who *need* to be seen quickly. These are normally available the same day, but on a 'first come, first served' basis.

## Telling your GP that you have HIV

You don't have to tell your GP that you have HIV. Some people are reluctant to tell their GP that they have HIV because they are worried about confidentiality.

But there are some reasons why it makes good sense to tell your GP that you have HIV. It will help them provide the most appropriate treatment and care. For example, if you are taking HIV treatment, it's important to consider potentially harmful interactions with other medications.

Knowing that you have HIV will enable your GP to look out for signs and symptoms of illnesses or [side-effects](#).

If confidentiality is your concern, then it's good to know that your GP medical records are confidential, and nobody can see them without your consent, except in very exceptional circumstances. If you are concerned about telling your GP that you have HIV, explore whether

staff at your HIV treatment centre, or an advocate, could help you assess your GP's practice around disclosure beforehand.

## Dental care

Good dental health is an important part of good overall health for everybody, including people with HIV.

In the UK, it is against the law for a dentist to refuse to treat you or discriminate against you in any way because you have HIV. Normal hygiene precautions in a dental surgery are enough to protect both you and the dentist/dental nurse from the risk of any infections.

You will be asked to provide a medical history at your first appointment with a dentist, and this will include a question about infection with HIV. The dentist should really only need to know if a person has HIV so they can check for signs of HIV disease in the mouth.

All staff at dentists, whether NHS or private, should respect and maintain your confidentiality.

### Find out more

**You and your healthcare team** Simple factsheet

**HIV clinic services** Simple factsheet

**Health checks** Basic leaflet, with pictures