Standing Orders for Laboratory Testing for and Treatment of Sexually Transmitted Infections – Oropharyngeal Screening

Purpose: To identify common sexually transmitted infections (STIs), chlamydia and gonorrhea, in clients and their sexual partners, attending syringe access programs in New Jersey and either treat or link them to treatment services.

Policy: Under these standing orders, the Access to Reproductive Care and HIV Services (ARCH) nurse is authorized to conduct oropharyngeal testing for chlamydia and gonorrhea for clients of syringe access programs and their sexual partners. The ARCH nurse is authorized to screen for these infections simultaneously and is not required to perform a risk assessment prior. Upon confirmation of an infection, the ARCH nurse is authorized to treat chlamydia and gonorrhea according to the most up-to-date CDC guidelines for treating sexually transmitted infections.

Background: Identifying STIs in injecting drug users and their sexual partners ensures the health of the client and prevents the spread of infectious disease among a population who might not otherwise access medical care. The identification of clients, who are at risk for STIs due to unprotected sexual practices, also permits the ARCH nurse to conduct risk-reduction counseling, perform condom demonstration, teach about safer injection practices, treat common STIs, as well as make referrals for contraception and ongoing family planning, as needed. Because many people with chlamydia are also co-infected with gonorrhea and vice versa, it is important to screen for these infections simultaneously. Sexually transmitted diseases can be diagnosed through diagnostic laboratory testing of clients presenting with STI symptoms. Early treatment of STIs improves long-term outcomes and decreases risks to sexual partners. Laboratory testing is conducted through the New Jersey Department of Health laboratory and antibiotics for treatment are provided by NJDOH.

Procedure for Conducting Laboratory Testing for STIs

1. **Offer to screen syringe access program clients and their sexual partners for common STIs on an opt-in basis:**

   Sample languages includes: *"We offer testing for certain infections that are sexually transmitted. I can test you for chlamydia and gonorrhea at the same time. It is important we test you in all of the places in your body where you may have been exposed to an infection. It is possible that if you have an infection in your throat and we only test your urine for a genital infection that your throat infection will not be detected and you will not receive proper treatment. Therefore, if you ever engage in oral sex I recommend that you receive this testing. I can also offer you or arrange for treatment if you do have an infection. Would you like to be tested today?"*

2. **Ask about additional signs and symptoms of STIs.** Individuals with STIs can have no symptoms so screening for these infections is preferred. However, the presence of discharge from the penis or vagina may contribute to the choice to offer diagnostic testing. Results from chlamydia and gonorrhea testing should be interpreted in conjunction with other laboratory and clinical data available.

3. **Ask about sites of sexual exposure.** Provide the client with testing kits (urine, rectal, oropharyngeal) according to their self-reported sites of sexual exposure.

4. **Collect specimen** according to New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) Public Health and Environmental Lab (PHEL) guidelines and collection kit directions. Each Syringe Access Program will be provided with Gen-Probe APTIMA specimen collection kits from the NJDOH PHEL that should be used in their entirety as the parts are not interchangeable.

    1. Instruct clients to follow directions to perform a self-collected oropharyngeal (throat) sample as follows:
        1. Sanitize your hands or wash hands with soap and water
        2. Open kit and remove tube and package
        3. Take the swab into your hand and look into a mirror.
        4. Open your mouth wide saying 'aaah'.
        5. Wipe the cotton swab around the tonsils area. Make sure to touch the back wall of your throat behind the uvula. Thinking about drawing a rainbow across the back of your throat.
        6. Put the swab back in the tube and close tightly. Be sure the tube is well-sealed so none of the liquid in the tube spills out.
        7. Sanitize or wash your hands with soap and water.
        8. Return the tube to the nurse or clinician.

5. **Label the specimen collection tube.** The specimen collection tube should be labeled with the **client's name, date of birth, and date of collection.** The demographic information collected is for epidemiological purposes only.

6. **Establish a mechanism for clients to receive results of STI testing and treatment when indicated.**

7. **Provide brief risk-reduction counseling about STIs, including but not limited to**
    1. How common STIs are spread
    2. Measures to reduce risk of STIs
    3. Consequences of untreated STIs, including risk to self, partner, and to infants if also at risk for becoming pregnant.

8. **Fill out the test request form.** The ARCH nurse fills out the green BACT-94 "Combination Screening Request" form to test for both chlamydia and gonorrhea simultaneously using one specimen. Use the clinic code assigned by the PHEL on the form
    1. The test request form, supplied with the test collection kits, is submitted for each specimen.
    2. Bundle the test request forms separately from the specimens i.e., do not wrap test request forms around tubes.

9. **Transport specimens according to NJDOH PHEL guidelines.** Oropharyngeal specimen collection tubes can be stored and transported to the lab at room temperature (from 2 to 30 degrees Celsius) and are stable for 30 days after collection.

1. Package specimen tubes in a leak proof bag before placing in a padded envelope
2. Mail specimens using two-day priority mail or regular mail, depending upon your location and the efficiency of regular mail
3. Mail specimens to:

   New Jersey State Department of Health
   Public Health & Environmental Labs
   Specimen Receiving
   PO Box 361
   Trenton, NJ 08620

10. PHEL will provide results via secure email to the ARCH nurse.

11. **If any of the client's tests are positive,** call the client and make an appointment to return for treatment or with a provider to treat the infection within the ARCH nurse's referral network. Provide written or graphic instruction for where to go for follow-up appointment(s). Complete an STD-11 Confidential STD Report and submit to the NJDOH per instructions.

12. **If the client's tests were all negative,** continue risk-reduction counseling and reinforce education provided in previous discussions. A negative result does not preclude a possible infection because results are dependent on adequate specimen collection. The ARCH nurse refers the client for additional testing if, clinically, they still suspect there is an infection present.

13. **Treat infection** according to CDC's most current guidelines on treatment of sexually transmitted infections available at https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/default.htm noting any updates to treatment.
    1. Assess for any history of drug allergy and alter regimen as appropriate
    2. Teach about potential side effects of medication

14. **Record results.** Record positive and negative results in the current database and in ARCH nursing medical records. Report the positive result and treatment outcome via the STD-11 Confidential STD Report and submit to the NJDOH per instructions.

15. **Store test kits at room temperature.** Refer to package insert for additional storage requirements of test kit and to PHEL instruction.

16. **If questions arise, call NJDOH PHEL.** Direct technical questions about STI testing to NJDOH STD Lab staff: Jacqueline Tobia (Jacqueline.Tobia@doh.nj.gov), Mark Steen (Mark.Steen@doh.nj.gov; 609-718-8374), or Justin Shaji (Justin.shaji@doh.nj.gov; (609) 718-8331. For questions about and ordering medications contact Steve Dunagan (Steven.Dunagan@doh.nj.gov, 609-826-4869).

This policy and procedure shall remain in effect until rescinded or until _____(date).

Medical Doctor's signature: _____ Effective date: _____