

Conditions favourable to sexual health *These strategies do not have a direct impact on HIV transmission, but include different practices and contexts that promote good sexual health and contribute to putting other strategies in place.*



INFORMING YOUR PARTNERS IF YOU HAVE AN STI

Informing your sexual partners if you have an STI or an HIV infection, prior to having sex or following a diagnosis

Description

- Partner notification consists of informing your current or recent sexual partners if you have been infected with an STI or HIV. This information can encourage your partners to get tested and help to break the chain of infection.
 - If you have just been diagnosed with an STI, advising recent partners is recommended so they can get tested and the chain of transmission can be broken.
 - If you have an STI for which there is no treatment, or if you are being treated for an STI, informing your partners before having sex is recommended so that you can use a prevention strategy that's appropriate to the situation.
- In Quebec, a health professional will carry out this process for certain STIs as part of a program called "*Intervention préventive auprès des personnes atteintes d'une infection transmissible sexuellement (ITS) et auprès de leurs partenaires*" (IPPAP). This program consists of¹
 - offering the person infected with an STI support in contacting their partners,
 - encouraging the infected person's partners to consult a health care provider (check-up, testing, and in most cases treatment).
- When a person is infected, the health care provider will
 - work with the person to identify sexual partners who may have been exposed,
 - make sure they know what the symptoms are, how transmission occurs, possible complications, and possible treatment so they can provide this information to partners,
 - offer them any informational material that may be useful including
 - *Entre caresses et baisers, une ITS s'est faufilée... Il faut en parler*, a booklet on what to do if you've been infected with chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, or HIV and how to notify partners,²
 - notification cards for chlamydia/gonorrhoea, syphilis, or HIV with key messages and information about these infections,³⁻⁵
 - www.sante.gouv.qc.ca (for a general audience) and www.itss.gouv.qc.ca (for youth) provide information on STIs and how to notify partners.
 - make sure the person understands that their partners should not only be notified, but also assessed, tested and, in most cases, quickly treated even if there are not presenting any symptoms,
 - discuss ways that sexual partners can be notified:
 - If the infected person wants to take charge of informing sexual partners, discuss potential difficulties and possible solutions that may be helpful.
 - If the person prefers not to do this, provide a way for another person (e.g. nurse, public health professional) to notifying partners while maintaining the person's anonymity.
 - if necessary, follow up with the infected person to ensure that sexual partners have in fact been notified,
 - offer to check and treat the partners or inform them of services that are locally available to get checked and treated for an STI or HIV.
- A number of web-based systems are available online that allow you to notify partners in a confidential way.⁶

Effectiveness

- IPPAP is an intervention recognized for being effective in¹
 - preventing the infected person from getting reinfected (except in the case of HIV),
 - breaking chains of infection,
 - preventing complications that can arise from an untreated infection.
- If an infected individual does not receive professional support, between 30% and 40% of sexual partners (and as many as 80% of casual partners) are unlikely to be informed that they have been exposed. Many will not experience any symptoms but may transmit the infection or develop complications.
- Using notification cards
 - strengthens IPPAP and improve its effectiveness,
 - increases the number of sexual partners who are notified, get checked and are treated if necessary
 - reduces the possibility that an infected person will be reinfected with chlamydia, gonorrhoea, or syphilis,^{3,5-7}
 - gives an infected person more legitimacy when notifying sexual partners.²
- The effectiveness of this strategy for reducing the risk of transmission relies on the infected individual's ability to identify partners and have a way to contact them, which can be difficult if there are casual partners.

Acceptability

- In the *Mobilise!* survey among men who have sex with men in Montreal, most (94%) of respondents knew about partner notification as a risk reduction strategy:⁸
- Advantages of partner notification:
 - Can break the chain of infection.⁹
 - Depending on the person's eligibility for the IPPAP program
 - A health professional can take charge of notifying sexual partners.
 - Sexual partners can get checked, tested, and treated if necessary.
 - Support is available to carrying out this strategy.
 - The anonymity of the infected person is maintained if a health care provider notifies sexual partners.
 - No costs are involved (free service).
- Disadvantages of partner notification:
 - Does not offer any direct protection against HIV and STIs.
 - May be difficult to locate partners in order to notify them.⁹

References

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3. Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux (MSSS). (2015). *Carte de notification chlamydia/gonorrhée.* Retrieved from <http://msssa4.msss.gouv.qc.ca/fr/document/publication.nsf/4b1768b3f849519c852568fd0061480d/23290ea9f3f9f94c85257e0600431c5b?OpenDocument>.
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8. Projet MOBILISE!. (2017). *Tri à plat des données de l'enquête MOBILISE!* (internal document).
9. Projet MOBILISE!. (2017). *Données issues des équipes citoyennes de projet MOBILISE!* (internal document).