As people with HIV are feeling better and living longer, HIV prevention has become an even more important part of chronic illness management.

What is secondary HIV prevention?
Prevention activities directed toward people who are HIV positive, with the intention of preventing transmission to those who are HIV negative. Secondary HIV prevention is sometimes referred to as prevention with positives. In contrast, primary prevention focuses on people who are not HIV infected.

What are the goals of secondary HIV prevention?
- Educate HIV-positive patients about how to reduce the risk of HIV transmission to others.
- Engage HIV-positive individuals to reduce risk practices (sexual and/or substance use behaviors).
- Support patients’ ability to adhere to their HIV medications and maintain viral suppression. This is an effective way to reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

What are secondary HIV prevention activities that can take place in VA health care settings?
- Educating patients so they know that the risk of HIV transmission is significantly reduced when their HIV viral loads are suppressed by ART.
- Supporting ART adherence efforts.
- Prescribing condoms for people who are HIV positive (male and female condoms are listed on the VHA National Formulary).
  - Condoms can be obtained free of charge from some health departments and other community agencies.
- Encouraging people to disclose their HIV-positive status to sex and drug-using partners.
- Providing referrals for PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) for HIV-negative sex or drug-injecting partners.
- Screening for risky sexual behaviors and providing education on safer sex practices.
- Screening for STDs. The presence of STDs indicates unprotected sexual activity, and STDs themselves can increase the risk of HIV transmission. Treatment of STDs, can reduce the risk of HIV transmission.
- Screening for substance abuse (drugs and alcohol) and, when appropriate, referring patients to substance abuse treatment programs.
- Providing mental health referrals for diagnosis and treatment of conditions that affect patients’ ability to adhere to HIV treatment and avoid risky behaviors.
- Screening for intimate partner violence (IPV) and referring patients (men and women) to IPV counselors for counseling on issues such as how to negotiate safer sex with a partner and/or disclose one’s HIV status.
- Addressing issues of homelessness and inadequate social support to improve treatment adherence and viral suppression.
- Providing ongoing risk assessment, because patients’ sexual and substance-use behaviors and their risk of transmitting HIV may change over time.
For patients with ongoing risk behaviors, how can VA health care providers help promote safer practices?

- Assess why risky behaviors are continuing. Reasons may include knowledge or skill deficits, depression or other psychiatric illnesses, homelessness, or lack of access to resources. Make referrals, when appropriate, to VA and non-VA services that can address these issues.

- Assess patients’ willingness to change risky behaviors using techniques such as motivational interviewing and the stages-of-change model.

- Refer patients to mental health and/or substance use counseling as appropriate.

- For patients who decline to use condoms, focus on adherence to ART, and achieving and maintaining viral suppression.

- Provide educational materials explaining the importance of adherence, risk reduction, and safe sexual practices.

- Discuss the benefits of maintaining a healthy lifestyle (e.g., exercise, dietary changes) to improve overall quality of life.

Who in VA medical centers, clinics, and Vet Centers can conduct secondary HIV prevention activities?

- Counselors in Vet Centers
- Case managers
- Nurse practitioners
- Nurses
- Pharmacists
- Physician assistants
- Physicians
- Psychiatrists
- Psychologists
- Social workers
- Substance abuse treatment providers
- Domiciliary counselors and staff
- Other health care providers

Additional Resources

Act Against AIDS, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/index.html