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**ACTS is endorsed by the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute as meeting all requirements for HIV counseling and testing.**

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# Part I – ACTS HIV Counseling and Testing System

## **ACTS A REALITY-BASED PARADIGM FOR HIV TESTING**

### **Facts on ACTS**

HIV/AIDS is the worst epidemic in history and rages on with no cure in sight. Until a vaccine is developed, the most promising prevention and care strategies are based on:

- 1. Identifying HIV-positive patients;**
- 2. Engaging them in appropriate treatment; and**
- 3. Helping them and others at risk to practice behaviors that prevent further infections.**

Unfortunately, the three components of this strategy have not evolved at an equal pace.

While it is true that in the United States monumental advances in treatment have slowed the death toll from HIV/AIDS, the human toll of this complex disease would have been significantly reduced if testing efforts evolved as successfully. Instead, it is estimated that up to 250,000 HIV-positive Americans still don't know they're infected. Unaware of their HIV status, many engage in high-risk behavior that contributes to the 40,000 new cases of HIV infection in the U.S. each year. HIV testing is the first step to treatment and a key step in prevention. The time has come to spur an evolution in HIV testing.

In the early years of the epidemic, concerns about stigma, complex social and legal implications and the gravity of an HIV diagnosis led to the creation of a complex counseling and testing process. This time-intensive, specialized model separated HIV testing from routine care, a development that now creates barriers to successful case finding.

Today new treatments provide those with HIV the promise of longer and healthier futures. At the same time, the number of new infections has not decreased in more than a decade. It is therefore imperative that we challenge ourselves to adopt more than reality-based strategies to implement the new CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) guidelines calling for routine HIV testing, utilizing streamlined counseling and increased use of rapid testing. To do so, providers must be engaged and empowered to identify and take advantage of every appropriate opportunity to test individuals for HIV and provide brief, persuasive prevention messages.

The Adolescent AIDS Program at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx has created the ACTS protocol (Assess, Consent, Test and Support) as a practical way to deliver routine HIV testing to both adolescents and adults in care settings. ACTS is a reality-based, efficient alternative to the historic model of HIV counseling, testing and referral that typically requires up to 45 minutes of intensive counseling. The ACTS materials reduce this process to as little as five to ten minutes, divided into four simple steps that can be utilized in any care setting:

- 
- **Assess patients' need for HIV testing**
  - **Consent patients for the test**
  - **Test with the most practical procedure, and deliver the results in person or by phone**
  - **Support those tested in obtaining the treatment and prevention services they need**
- 

ACTS provides clinicians with the tools to make every interaction with sexually active adults and adolescents a chance to stem the transmission tide. ACTS supplies a provider pocket guide, sample talking points, education materials and a simple training guide. The ACTS system meets all Health Department and CDC requirements for HIV counseling and testing.

## IT'S TIME FOR ACTS

According to the CDC, HIV testing should be offered to all patients in communities with HIV prevalence of one percent or more. In lower prevalence communities, testing should be offered after patients have been screened for specific risks, which should include men who have sex with men, intravenous drug users, patients with present or past STDs or hepatitis and people who have sex with partners at high risk for HIV. The difficulty is that not all people at risk are aware of or comfortable discussing their risk, presenting a potential barrier to the provider.

By simplifying the testing process, including the challenge of risk determination, ACTS provides a method by which providers can make routine office visits an opportunity to test for HIV. ACTS takes into account the limited counseling time available in primary care settings, providing a five- to ten-minute process, with the emphasis on determining the individual's HIV status, but including brief motivational prevention messages. The system allows practices to focus their limited time on the needs of people who have tested HIV-positive, usually less than one in 100 patients. Additionally, ACTS suggests referrals for supplemental services in settings that can't provide comprehensive prevention or care.

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- The protocol divides the HIV testing process into four brief steps: **Assess, Consent, Test and Support**. The manual guides healthcare staff through a simplified process of HIV counseling, testing and referral. *See the Pocket Guide for a summary of these steps.*
  - Part I of the manual contains talking points for using the ACTS system with patients. These can be adapted as required by local conditions and your individual style and needs. Part I also includes all the tools you need for testing, including consent forms, New York State reporting forms and patient handouts.
  - Part II includes in-depth background information for providers, including a description of HIV testing and an extended discussion about delivering positive results.
  - A resource section lists places to go for more information and guidance. Supplement these with local referrals.
- 

We offer ACTS to reinvigorate and simplify the way HIV counseling and testing is offered. Use it, adapt it, and let us know what you think!

# ACTS Pocket Card

## ACTS

ASSESS  
CONSENT  
TEST  
SUPPORT

*A Rapid System for HIV Counseling and Testing*

### ASSESS

- Explain it is now standard practice to discuss HIV with all patients
  - Explain benefits of testing for patient's health and prevention
  - Describe HIV transmission: sex/needles/perinatal
- Review risk screen or explain that HIV testing is advisable if:
  - You have ever had sex
  - You have ever used IV drugs
- If yes, recommend testing and assess testing readiness

### CONSENT

- Review DOH consent form: meaning of positive and negative results, confidential vs. anonymous testing, names reporting, partner notification and domestic violence screening
- Obtain consent

### TEST

- Describe/provide HIV test (blood, oral, urine or rapid)
- Make plan to deliver results or have patient wait for rapid results

### SUPPORT

#### Give results and allow time to process

- **HIV-negative:**
  - Clarify if need to retest in three months (window period)
  - HIV testing by itself is not prevention: discuss prevention
- **HIV-positive:**
  - Provide support and link to care and prevention
  - Review HIV reporting, partner notification and domestic/partner violence issues

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# ACTS Pocket Card

## Resources

### Provider Helplines

- **AIDS info** (800) 448-0440
- **Warmline HIV Clinician Telephone Consultation Service** (800) 933-3413

### Patient Helplines

- **AIDS Hotline** (800) 342-AIDS
- **AIDS Hotline (Spanish)** (800) 344-SIDA
- **NYS Anonymous Test Sites** (800) 962-5065
- **Domestic Violence** (800) 799-SAFE
- **HIV Services in NYC** (800) AIDS-NYC
- **Substance Abuse** (800) 662-HELP

### State and Citywide

- **AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP)** (800) 542-AIDS
- **PartNer Assistance Program (PNAP)**  
**NYC** (888) 792-1711  
**NYS** (800) 541-2437
- **Legal Action Center** (212) 243-1313
- **NYS Guidelines: HIV C&T, DV Screening and Youth Issues** [hivguidelines.org](http://hivguidelines.org)
- **NY/NJ AIDS Education and Training Center** [nynjaetc.org](http://nynjaetc.org)

## ACTS Information & Youth-Friendly Resources

**Adolescent AIDS Program: Health Care & Education**  
(718) 882-0232 • [adolescentaids.org](http://adolescentaids.org)

**Youth HIV Testing Sites – NYC & Nationwide**  
(718) 881-TEST • [gettinbusy.org](http://gettinbusy.org)

## Local Contacts



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