

+ POSITIVE DISPATCH

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HIV Spike in Nova Scotia / Please Get Tested

Nova Scotia has posted a significant increase in the number of new HIV diagnosis in the first six months of 2018 with 16 new cases. "The concern is that we've already reached what we'd expect for an entire year after six months," Dr. Trevor Arnason, medical officer with the NS Health Authority. It is not yet clear whether this increase reflects increased testing or whether it reflects an increase in infections.

Dr. Arnason said it appears certain individuals acquired HIV in the very recent past. "We're trying to make health care providers aware that we're seeing more cases and they should look for the signs and symptoms and get people tested". The advisory about the increase sent to doctors and nurses in late July said the most commonly reported risk factors were men who have sex with men or people who inject drugs.

ACNS has been in regular contact with Nova Scotia Health Authority officials since the news broke. As the Health Authority continues to look for an explanation for the spike in NS HIV diagnosis ACNS will continue to follow the developments closely, and we will continue to work with the Province to develop an informed response.



ACNS recommends that all sexually active people get tested for HIV and all other STIs - at least once a year. It's possible to have HIV - or other STIs - without having any symptoms for a very long time. The only way to truly know is to be tested. However, a lack of symptoms does not mean you cannot be the source of infection for someone else.

In fact an undiagnosed infection and no symptoms is the most common scenario where STIs - HIV included - get transmitted. Even with a lack of symptoms the infection may still be doing damage to your own health.

If you do test HIV+ treatments today can control the virus to the point that you can still be healthy and live a normal life-span. If your HIV infection is fully controlled by medication it will be impossible to be the

source of infection for anyone else. For info on Treatment as Prevention / Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) see <http://www.catie.ca/en/positiveside/summer-2017/uu>.

ACNS has free condoms and lube available in our office for anyone to pick up. If you are a member of a high-risk group for HIV ask about PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis - the pill to prevent HIV) as a highly effective way to prevent HIV. For info on PrEP see <https://www.acns.ns.ca/info-resources/prep.html>.

2018 AIDS Walk Cancelled



The AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia regrets to announce that the AIDS Walk for Life Halifax will not be held this year. Several circumstances have combined to make a successful outcome of this event impossible. We

apologize for any inconvenience this decision has caused, and we will continue to review options for future fundraising and community building events.

For questions about ACNS fundraising please contact Dena Simon at ed@acns.ns.ca or by phone at 902-425-4882 ext. 227.

HIV+ Gay Men: We Want to Hear from You!

For over ten years, HIV positive gay men have joined together each month for friendship, laughter and a meal provided by ACNS. Our Poz Guys group has seen fewer and fewer people attending recently, so we are curious to know if there are better ways to serve you.

ACNS is inviting HIV+ gay men to join us for a discussion and dinner to explore ideas for a better program. Whether you have attended Poz Guys in the past, or if this would be your first meeting, we are interested in hearing what you have to say! Two bus tickets can be provided for you when you get to the dinner. The Poz Guys Dinner & Discussion will be Tuesday, Sep 18 5 - 7 pm.

Please RSVP to Lori so we know to expect you sc@acns.ns.ca 902-425-4882 or 1-800-566-2437 ext 225.

If you are not an HIV+ gay man, but you're interested in forming a group, please get in touch as we also have plans for more groups in the future. In particular we're looking at starting an HIV+ women's group and HIV+ youth group, so stay tuned!



NS PrEP Announcement!

The Government of Nova Scotia announced in late July that oral Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (aka PrEP) has been added to the provincial formulary, including it as a benefit under provincial Pharmacare programs. The announcement also indicated that there are plans to work with stakeholders in the coming months "to work toward achieving the final goal of increased access to this prevention medication." ACNS will be participating in those consultations moving forward. See the government announcement at <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20180720003>.

At this time Pharmacare is the only government coverage of PrEP available. People enrolled in Pharmacare programs are assessed based on their income, and charged premiums and co-pays according to their income level and number of people in their family. For more information about Pharmacare visit <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/pharmacare/>.



Other PrEP Resources

ACNS PrEP info page: www.acns.ns.ca/info-resources/prep.html
PrEP Nova Scotia: <https://PrEPnovascotia.ca>
PrEP for Women (From The Well Project): <http://www.thebody.com/content/69741/prep-for-women.html?ap=1100>
PrEP for Understudied populations: http://www.catie.ca/en/pif/fall-2018/prep-understudied-populations-exploring-questions-about-efficacy-and-safety?utm_source=fb&utm_medium=socmed&utm_campaign=081518&utm_content=en

PHA Group Seeking Members

The Network Too! Atlantic Region PHA Network is a Facebook group for People Living with HIV (PHAs) in the Atlantic region. Interested in joining the discussion and helping decide the group's direction? Do you want or need this regional network to exist? Should the focus be a social network, a political network, a network that gets define as needed? To join or find out more go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1245229068941944/>.

Gay Men's Nutrition Study



A Halifax-based researcher is seeking gay men to participate in a photovoice study to explore how gay culture shapes the nutritional beliefs, values, practices and body image of gay men. Participants will take part in an introductory workshop, be asked to take photos on the topic, and discuss these photos in individual interviews. They will also plan a community art show in which some of the photos can be displayed.

If you are interested in participating or want more information, please contact Phillip Joy at pjoy@dal.ca. Participants need to identify as gay, be 18 years or older, and live in the Halifax metro area.

Announcement a Great First Step

ACNS Press Release

HALIFAX, NS, July 20, 2018 - The AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia (ACNS) welcomes the province's announcement today as a solid first step in making oral Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, more commonly known as PrEP, accessible to those who would most benefit from it.

"We're pleased that PrEP has made it onto the provincial formulary," says ACNS Executive Director Dena Simon, "and we look forward to working with the Province to ensure those groups most at risk will be added to the list of who has coverage."

"The research supporting the effectiveness of PrEP has always been very solid," says ACNS Prevention Educator Chris Aucoin. "Even more conclusively, in large centres where there has been strong uptake in PrEP for several years, HIV rates have dropped by as much as 40% in a single year."

ACNS has been educating healthcare providers for the past six years about the potential of PrEP when the initial research studies made it clear this would be a valuable prevention tool moving forward. The Coalition has also been providing information to people interested in accessing PrEP since before Health Canada formally approved it in 2016.

Anyone who'd like to find out more information about PrEP can check the dedicated ACNS web page at <https://www.acns.ns.ca/info-resources/prep.html>. This resource includes information for health care providers and the general public. It also includes a video of the PrEP public information panel that took place at the Halifax Central Public Library in January of this year.

2018 Hfx Pride Parade



What an amazing Halifax Pride Parade we had this year! Even though the weather was gloomy, every person we saw was smiling. We were so thrilled to see so many people attend this important event. Special thanks to Beaton's Towing for donating the big tow truck to be used for our float and Wilson's for the BBQ which was a huge hit.

Also thanks to the lovely queens that made our float come alive: Bridget Von Snaps, Cynthia Stilts, Zara Matrix and Racheal Slurr. Thanks to Daryl Mombourquette, volunteer extraordinaire and lastly, a huge thanks to Alex Hadlaw, our summer student, who took on the planning of the entire event for ACNS. We are looking forward to the next one already!

Sex Now 2018 Survey – Soon Online!

Miss out on your chance to do the Sex Now Survey at Halifax Pride? Well good news, the online phase will begin this fall. The survey is conducted by the [Community Based Research Centre for Gay Men's Health](#) in partnership with ACNS and other Gay Men's Health projects across the country.

Sometimes referred to as "The Gay Census," the survey asks gay, bi and other men who have sex with men about aspects of their daily lives in an effort to better understand the issues affecting our communities across Canada. Questions cover a range of issues facing gay, bi, Two-Spirit and queer men (inclusive of trans and gender queer masculine folks) and include everything from sexual practices and



health, to opinions on public policies. This year's Sex Now Survey is also tackling some big issues including the current gay blood ban.

The online survey should go live in late September. To subscribe for updates on the survey go to <https://www.facebook.com/sexnowsurvey>.

For more about the survey generally go to <http://www.cbrc.net/sexnow2018> or contact Chris at GMHC@acns.ns.ca or at 902-425-4882 / 1-800-566-2437 ext 222.



A few members of a great team! From left to right are San Patten, Ryan Thompson and Preet Bhogal.

World AIDS Day Vigil

On Saturday, December 1st at 7 pm the AIDS Coalition of Nova Scotia will be hosting a World AIDS Day Vigil at the Italian Cultural Center at 2629 Agricola St., Halifax. All are welcome to join us as we remember and celebrate the lives of individuals living with HIV/AIDS who have passed away in Nova Scotia. The night will include reading of the first names of these individuals, lighting a candle to honour their lives, musical performances, poetry, and more.

Attendees are invited to bring non-perishable food items in support of Manna for Health, a local food bank supporting the special nutritional needs of individuals living with HIV/AIDS and other chronic illnesses. The location is accessible, on a bus route, and has street parking. The ceremony starts at 7 pm followed by a reception with tea, coffee and desserts.

If you would like to read names of people who have passed, or for more information, please contact Lori at 902-425-4882 / 1-800-566-2437 ext 225 or sc@acns.ns.ca.



PHA Voices Sought for Campaign

Stigma and discrimination are something every PHA deals with at one time or another. Last year ACNS was part of the hugely successful *Voices for World AIDS Day Media Campaign* organized by CANFAR (Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research) aimed at breaking down stigma and educating about HIV.

Part of the campaign is to gather the stories of people living with HIV/AIDS to share on the Voices for World AIDS Day website. Last year there were 12 AIDS Service Organizations involved across the country, and through sharing messages through social media and via our websites, over one million people were reached. This year we are partnering with CANFAR again to spread the messages of people living with HIV with hopes of it going even further.

If you would like to share your story to be put on the website, please contact Lori at 902-425-4882 ext. 225 or 1-800-566-2437 ext 225 or email her at sc@acns.ns.ca

CATIE Blog: AIDS Conference 2018 - The Good and the Bad

"At this year's International AIDS Conference ... we witnessed several pivotal developments in the global HIV response. We also saw some setbacks in our efforts to prevent infections and improve the lives of people living with HIV." - Sean Hosein, The CATIE Blog

The Good News

- More evidence that undetectable = untransmittable (U=U)
- HIV treatment could get simpler
- Canada is getting closer to 90-90-90

The Bad News

- Courts still don't understand HIV science
- A more virulent strain of HIV has emerged in Saskatchewan

While some strains of HIV can become resistant to certain drugs, that's not what's going on in Saskatchewan. Immune-resistant strains of HIV are just as treatable as any other strain, and people on treatment can live healthy lives with almost no chance of passing on the virus to anyone else.

For Sean Hosein's full CATIE Blog see http://blog.catie.ca/2018/08/07/aids-2018-the-good-and-the-bad/?utm_source=fb&utm_medium=socmed&utm_campaign=080718&utm_content=en.

\$1.4 Million HepC Grant

A major Gilead Sciences Inc. grant has been awarded to support a research team led by ID Clinic physician Dr. Lisa Barrett. The research project is focussing on the elimination of hepatitis C in the province. In addition to being an infectious disease specialist at the ID Clinic, Dr. Barret is also an associate professor at Dalhousie University, and she recently added her voice to the ongoing calls for PrEP access in Nova Scotia by participating in a Halifax Pride Week panel on the subject and doing media interviews.

“Our research will help focus local efforts and bring us closer to the World Health Organization’s target of eliminating viral hepatitis as a major public threat by 2030,” Barrett said in a news release from the NS Health Authority. “It is important that we involve not only decision makers but we are engaging patients in the plan as well.”

Dr. Barrett’s team will be taking a two-pronged approach to gather data about the feasibility of a provincial program to eliminate HepC in Nova Scotia. The first step is getting a rapid hepatitis C test into community clinics. Nova Scotia has hepatitis C rates “well-above” the national average.



Yoga Study for PHAs in HRM

Adria Quigley, a Ph.D student at Dalhousie U. is recruiting HIV+ participants who are 35+ to be involved in a yoga study. Participants will have a 50% chance of ending up in either a yoga group or a control group. No yoga experience is necessary as classes can be modified to all ability levels. You will be compensated for your participation. Classes take place in the north end of Halifax. Contact Adria at 782-234-2121 (local number) or adriaquigley@gmail.com.

HIV Movie Screening at Film Festival

The Atlantic International Film Festival is screening a feature film about love, friendship, art and AIDS set in France in 1993. The movie is a period-specific examination of gay male identities.

Sorry Angel tells the story of two men navigating their feelings for each other from opposite ends of that spectrum of experience. Thirty-five-year-old Parisian writer Jacques has AIDS and already mistrusts that the best in life is yet to come. Twenty-two-year-old student Arthur is in the heat of his queer awakening and eager to jump into bed, and a relationship, with Jacques and refuses to think that everything in life might not be possible.

Sorry Angel (Plaire, aimer et courir vite) French with English subtitles. Playing Fri Sep 14, 2018 | 9:40pm | Park Lane Cinemas, Halifax. Check out the trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEclOo9XHHY>. For the film festival info go to <http://www.finfestival.ca/event/12fa15ad8faa131016e1714bd3fb28cc>.

What’s Going On?

September

- Tue Sep 18, 5 - 7 pm, Halifax
Poz Gay Guys Dinner & Discussion
See article page 1 for details
- Late September
Sex Now Survey - ONLINE
See article page 3 for details

October

- Thu Oct 11, 5 - 7 pm, Halifax
Poz Gay Guys Group
Contact **Lori**

November

- Thu Nov 8, 5 - 7 pm, Halifax
Poz Gay Guys Group
For info contact **Lori**
- Nov 26-30
AIDS Awareness Week

December

- Sat Dec 1, 7 pm, Italian Cult. Ctr., 2629 Agricola St.
ACNS World AIDS Day Vigil
See article page 3 for details
- Wednesday, Dec. 12, 3 - 6 pm, 5516 Spring Garden Rd. Halifax
ACNS Holiday Open House ... and Bake-Off!
Complete detail in the next Positive Dispatch. Contact **Lori** for details
- Thursday, Dec.13, 5 - 7 pm, Halifax
Poz Gay Guys Group
For info contact **Lori**

COMING in 2019

Spring 2019, Halifax

Totally OUTright in Nova Scotia

A free five day sexual health leadership training program for young Gay, Bi, Two-spirit, Trans* and Queer (GB2STQ*) men (aged 18-29) from across NS. Contact Chris for info.

Want to Contribute

If there is anything you want to see in this newsletter, **we would love to hear from you!** If you know of any events coming up or have any info you would like to share, please contact **Chris**.

Staff Directory

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