

# Routine screening for HIV infection is recommended in all subjects aged over 13

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**H**uman immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection represents one of the most important health problems worldwide. It is estimated that more than a quarter of all infected individuals are not detected and unaware of the diagnosis. According to the Center of Disease Control (CDC) more than one third of newly diagnosed HIV positive subjects develop AIDS in less than 1 year, suggesting that these individuals were infected for a long period prior to diagnosis. The current two-step screening method (enzyme immunoassay, ELISA, followed by confirmatory Western blot or immunofluorescent assay) is extremely effective in identifying infected individuals.

In this context, the American College of Physicians has issued a guideline (published online first in a prestigious medical Journal) arguing for universal screening of all individuals aged over 13, unless they specifically deny screening (the so called opt-out screening). The most

important reasons behind this decision are summarized below:

1. early diagnosis and treatment has been shown to increase survival and probably decrease transmission in HIV positive individuals;
2. screening only people at risk for HIV infection has failed to detect about half of HIV positive subjects, and up to one quarter of all HIV positive subjects reported no high-risk behaviors;
3. Routine opt-out screening has been highly successful in prenatal HIV screening, making mother-to-child transmission almost eliminated from the United States;
4. Routine screening is cost-effective, even if the prevalence of HIV is less than 0.1%.

These guidelines also underscore the need for further active screening of subjects at risk of HIV infection and prenatal screening.

In conclusion, according to these new guidelines, routine HIV screening of all subjects aged over 13 is recommended, unless they specifically deny screening.

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*Comment on the paper:*

Amir Qaseem A, Snow V, Shekelle P, et al for the Clinical Efficacy Assessment Subcommittee of the American College of Physicians – Screening for HIV in Health Care Settings: A Guidance Statement From the American College of Physicians and HIV Medicine Association. *Ann Intern Med* 2009; 150:1-7