
Alberta Health and Wellness

Blood Borne Pathogens and Sexually Transmitted Infections Action Plan

June 2008



Alberta Blood Borne Pathogens and Sexually Transmitted Infections Action Plan

On April 16, 2008, the Alberta government announced the Health Action Plan to improve accessibility to health care and to ensure sustainability of the health system. Implementation of a Blood Borne Pathogens (BBP) and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Strategy was identified as a three-month action item.

Why the need for a Blood Borne Pathogens and Sexually Transmitted Infections Action Plan?

Alberta has among the highest rates of gonorrhoea, chlamydia and syphilis in Canada. This epidemic has reached a critical state – babies are dying from syphilis.

The rates of gonorrhoea, chlamydia and syphilis are rising at a rate greater than the national rate. STI rates have more than doubled over eight years. STI increases the risk of transmitting and acquiring HIV. Efforts to prevent STI also prevent HIV. In 2007, there were 225 cases of HIV as compared to 176 in 1999.

In March, 2007 the Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health declared a syphilis outbreak in Alberta. Since 2005, Alberta has seen 14 cases of babies with syphilis. To date, five babies have died and nine others will require long term follow up and assistance for those most severely affected. There had been no cases of syphilis in babies between 1992 and 2002 in the province.

Prior to 2000, Alberta had not had any locally acquired cases of syphilis for several years. In 2007, we had approximately 250 cases of syphilis reported.

BBP and STI are major causes of acute illness, long-term disability, infertility, cervical cancer, and even death. All of these diseases result in considerable health, social, emotional and economic costs, many of which are yet to be experienced. Given the grave and life-threatening significance of these diseases Alberta Health and Wellness must provide leadership to effectively prevent and manage BBP and STI in Alberta. Action is required that enables all Albertans access to the prevention and management of infections caused by BBP and STI.

A comprehensive BBP/STI Action Plan is necessary. Education is key. Public awareness of the risks and health consequences of BBP and STI are lacking. There appears to be a growing sense of security and unfounded optimism in the community, particularly among youth, about treatments and cures contributing to complacency and overall increased levels of unsafe sexual behaviour.

This Action Plan is aligned with other provincial efforts to reduce blood borne pathogens such as HIV and hepatitis C, support harm reduction activities, increase the healthy decision making behaviours of students, enhance Aboriginal people's health and promote overall youth and community wellness.

The attached table outlines Alberta Health and Wellness initiatives to decrease rates of BBP and STI in the province.

STI & HIV are preventable

HIV remains incurable

Alberta has the highest rates of chlamydia and gonorrhoea in the 15–24 year age group

PUBLIC AWARENESS/EDUCATION ACTIVITIES				
Activity/Initiative	Target Audience	Responsibility	Description	Timelines
Develop and Implement a <i>Provincial Syphilis Prevention Campaign</i>	General Public and those at greatest risk	AHW	<p>Capital Health, working in partnership with key stakeholders will develop and implement a Provincial Syphilis Prevention Campaign.</p> <p>Campaigns need to be targeted, have impact and be delivered many times in many different ways to a variety of audiences in order to have an impact on knowledge, attitude and behaviour.</p> <p>Promote the STI/HIV 1-800 Information Line</p> <p>The 1-800 line is a province-wide 24 hour toll-free phone line that provides confidential information on STI, HIV and other blood borne pathogens. During regular business hours nurses are available to answer questions, up to date recordings are available at other hours. Capital Health operates the provincial resource.</p>	2008-2009
Develop and Implement <i>It takes two - Condom and Pill Initiative</i>	18 to 35 year old women	AHW	To encourage physicians to counsel women currently using the pill or other forms of birth control about the importance of using condoms as protection against BBP and STI.	TBD
Develop and Distribute Resources	All Albertans	AHW	Update existing AHW resources, where appropriate, and procure BBP/STI resources developed by external provincial and federal agencies for dissemination to Alberta Health Services Board (AHSB) Regional Health Areas and other ministries e.g. Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security, community agencies and the public in order to strengthen prevention education. When available, the priority should be on resources targeting high risk groups. Resource selection and distribution will be undertaken in consultation with regional and community partners.	June 2008 - ongoing
• Increase Sexual Health Promotion	Immigrants and Refugees	AHW / Alberta Employment and Immigration (AEI)	Develop/adapt resources for immigrant and refugee populations for distribution to their settlement offices which in turn could distribute to newcomers to Alberta.	

Activity/Initiative	Target Audience	Responsibility	Description	Timelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase Sexual Health Promotion 	Transient and temporary workers	AHW / AEI	Provide information on STI rates, STI/HIV 1-800 line and STI services available in Alberta for distribution to all Occupational Health and Safety Nurses. Encourage industries (e.g. oil/gas camps, tourism) to include BBP/STI prevention in their general health messaging and wellness programs.	
SCHOOL FOCUSED				
Increase the healthy choices of students by implementing the following components:				June 2008 - ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and Update Curriculum and resources related to sexual health. 	Students/ Youth	Alberta Education (AE) / AHW	Career and Technology Studies, Health and Career and Life Management classes. Include content related to sexual health as part of the Healthy Choices Plan	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement a STI/BBP Coordinators Initiative 	Students/ Youth	AHW	Implement an initiative to hire STI/BBP coordinators in AHSB: Regional Health Areas to work closely with schools and community-based organizations to enhance the promotion and support of comprehensive sexual health and harm reduction instruction in the school system.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance Safer Sex and Healthy Sexual Behaviour 	Students/ Youth	AE	Enhance the promotion and support of comprehensive sexual health and harm reduction instruction in the school system consistent with mandatory school curricula and in accordance with the Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education. Provide education early to help children and youth develop healthy approaches to sexual behaviour and healthy relationships before they establish unhealthy practices.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and update curriculum and resources related to Healthy Relationships. 	Students/ Youth	AE / AHW	As part of Education's Wellness programming, review current curriculum for content related to promoting the development of healthy relationships and revise as necessary to enhance the content.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance Professional Education and Training 	Teachers/ Educators	AHW / AE	Increase school educator's access to training, tools and resources required to deliver quality sexual health education. Develop and implement clear standards for and training on sexual health information and BBP/STI prevention activities, including effective counselling about safer sex practices, to be carried out by professionals and other front-line workers.	

OTHER SCHOOL RELATED INITIATIVES				
Activity/Initiative	Target Audience	Responsibility	Description	Timelines
Implement Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Immunization Program	All girls entering Grade 5	AHW / AHSB: Regional Health Areas	The Alberta HPV Immunization Program plan was approved in June 2008. The June 12, 2008 News Release states that all girls entering grade 5 in September 2008 will be eligible to receive a vaccine that will prevent 70% of cervical cancers. Grade 9 girls will also be eligible for the vaccine from September 2009 to June 2012. The voluntary immunization program will align with the current Hepatitis B immunization program.	September 2008 -ongoing
Enhance STI prevention in post-secondary institutions	Post secondary students	AHW / Alberta Advanced Education (AAE)	Provide information on healthy relationship development, STI rates, STI/HIV 1-800 line and STI services available in Alberta for distribution to Post-Secondary Institutions for distribution to Student Health Services, Housing (Residences), International Student Centres, etc. This age group has the highest rates of STI (gonorrhea and chlamydia)	September 2008 - ongoing
DATA AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT				
Enhance and Modify Communicable Disease Reporting System	General population	AHW	<p>Communicable Disease Reporting System (CDRS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • replacement of the current CDRS system • develop an outbreak management component for all notifiable diseases and emerging pathogens under surveillance <p>The current CDRS/STI system does not integrate with the rest of the communicable disease applications within AHW and AHSB: Regional Health Areas and has no outbreak management functionality. An evaluation of CDRS has demonstrated a lack of capacity in some vital areas, thus impacting the Ministry's ability to conduct disease surveillance and respond to public health risks. As such, there is an urgent need to replace CDRS with an application that is adaptable to managing new diseases as they emerge.</p>	TBD

SCREENING				
Activity/Initiative	Target Audience	Responsibility	Description	Timelines
Implement Enhanced Prenatal Syphilis Screening	General population	AHW	AHW will work with laboratory partners to implement syphilis re-screening of pregnant women.	2008-2009
REGIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES				
STI/BBP Regional Action Plan	General public/professionals	AHSB: Regional Health Areas	Require AHSB: Regional Health Areas to develop and submit a STI/BBP Action Plan.	In conjunction with STI/BBP Coordinators Initiative
BLOOD BORNE PATHOGENS ACTIVITIES				
Decrease the transmission of BBP such as HIV and hepatitis C by reducing the harms associated with non-prescription needle and other harmful drug use:				
Implement the Non Prescription Needle Use initiative activities focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional and Community Education 	Professionals and at risk populations	AHW	Provide BBP education tailored for medical, pharmacy and nursing students.	September 2008
Implement the Non Prescription Needle Use initiative activities focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional and Community Education 	Professionals and at risk populations	AHW	Implement strategies to increase number of physicians and pharmacists licensed to provide methadone.	September 2008

Activity/Initiative	Target Audience	Responsibility	Description	Timelines
Implement the Non Prescription Needle Use initiative activities focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health and Addictions 	Professionals and Populations at risk	AADAC/ Alberta Mental Health Board / Alberta Solicitor General and Public Security (ASGPS)	Develop a proposal for a pilot project between AHW and Safe Communities to decrease risk of both disease transmission and crime.	June 2008
Implement the Non Prescription Needle Use (NPNU) initiative focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prisons 	At risk populations	AHW / ASGPS	Increase access to methadone in prisons.	September 2008
Implement the Non Prescription Needle Use initiative focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prisons 	At risk populations	AHW / Community Partners	Provide prevention, care and support to those with HIV in prison through AIDS service organizations.	June 2008