

State Health Department updates disease reporting requirements to enhance infectious disease prevention

The Louisiana Department of Health's Office of Public Health has updated its disease reporting requirements to help the State tackle three diseases that cause significant illness, including death: HIV, syphilis and hepatitis C. This reporting change requires the reporting of all test results of these conditions.

The state has extremely high rates of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis C. These conditions are monitored through multiple laboratory tests, some of which can show a negative result even after an individual is infected. These negative tests can mean a person is early in their infection, is effectively being treated, or has been cured, among other possibilities.

Because a negative test might not rule out an infection or might provide important information about treatment success, the Office of Public Health will now receive all lab results for these infections.

"This will help us get a clearer picture of the size and shape of these epidemics and our efforts to stop them so that we can focus resources and attention on preventing and treating them more effectively across the state," said Dr. Alex Billioux, assistant secretary of the Office of Public Health.

These testing guidelines follow recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This guidance outlines the benefits of collecting all test results including getting patients into medical care earlier for appropriate prevention counseling, and to determine if follow up testing is appropriate.

The reporting change will also reduce wasted public health efforts, allow for improved follow-up of patients who may be infected, and assist with proper diagnosis, treatment and anonymous notification of people who are potentially exposed to the infection.

"Knowing your status can prevent the spread of these infections," Billioux said. "For infections like HIV, the risk of transmitting it is at its highest when someone is newly infected and some lab tests may still be negative, highlighting the importance of identifying all the lab results for these tests."

Gathering all testing information will also allow the state to monitor the effectiveness of screening for these infections and identify areas of the state and providers in need of education and outreach.

Importantly, negative test results that are not linked to a known or suspected case of one of these infections will not be reviewed individually or followed up, and personally identifiable information will be removed from them after 18 months. Like other lab results, all personally identifiable information sent to the Office of Public Health is stored securely according to national standards and managed at all times with best practices to ensure individuals' privacy is protected and in compliance with all HIPAA standards