

# Quick Tips to Implement *Opt-Out* with a Universal Screening Approach

## Key Conversation Topics

The following sample language is helpful during exams when discussing sensitive topics with patients such as chlamydia (CT) and gonorrhea (NG) screening.

- ▶ “Our standard process is to screen all female patients ages 15-24 for chlamydia and gonorrhea every year, regardless of their sexual history. Getting screened is an important part of staying healthy.”
- ▶ “Chlamydia and gonorrhea are common infections that usually have no symptoms, so even if you don’t have symptoms, you could still be infected.”
- ▶ “STI testing is simple. We can test a urine sample or self-collected vaginal swab.”
- ▶ “Chlamydia and gonorrhea can cause lifelong problems like infertility if they aren’t detected and treated. Fortunately, if detected early, chlamydia and gonorrhea can be easily treated with antibiotics.”
- ▶ “We will contact you privately if any tests are positive and provide treatment for you and any sexual partners.”

## Patient Confidentiality

There are several opportunities to ensure that patients and their parents, when present, feel comfortable during medical exams. The approaches listed below may help to increase the utilization of recommended healthcare services among adolescents:

- ▶ Provide a letter to parents about the importance of confidentiality during their children’s exams. Explain the Universal Screening policy and assure parents that discussions are age appropriate.
- ▶ Develop an office policy specifying that staff will not discuss or release sensitive health information to parents without the patient’s permission.
- ▶ Encourage patients to communicate with their parents, openly, about sensitive topics like sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, and more.
- ▶ Limit the number of individuals who speak with the patient about sensitive topics, such as healthcare providers (HCP), registered nurses, and nurse’s assistants.
- ▶ Ask for a personal contact number or email to alert teenagers of test results and other private information following their visits.
- ▶ Restrict or modify parental access to a patient’s confidential information through EHR/EMR online portals if state laws allow.
- ▶ If a patient’s confidentiality concerns persist, recommend Title X-funded free clinics. These clinics can ensure confidential visits, avoid billing issues, and prevent the explanation of benefits for services that may breach confidentiality.

**NOTE:** As of 2018, most of not all states and the District of Columbia allow minors to consent to STI services. Eighteen of these states allow, but do not require, a physician to inform a minor’s parents that he or she is seeking or receiving STI services when the doctor deems it in the minor’s best interest.<sup>1</sup> Refer to your state laws for more details.

## Proper Sample Handling

While collecting a sample from a patient for STI or any other testing, remember:

- ▶ If collecting first-catch urine samples, follow the urine collection guide for the appropriate test.
- ▶ Ask patients who have urinated recently to use self-collected vaginal swabs to provide samples.
- ▶ Immediately refrigerate all samples.
- ▶ Ask for private contact numbers where you can reach patients to deliver results.
- ▶ If you are unable to gather a sample before the patient sees the HCP, notify the HCP so that, if necessary, he or she may collect a sample during the exam.

## Set Up Reminders in the EMR

Make the most of the electronic medical record (EMR) system in your practice. You can often program built-in reminders and flags that remind employees of best practices and quality care for age-based CT/NG screening.

## Communicating Results

Create and follow a standardized protocol to deliver CT/NG screening results to patients. As part of that protocol be sure to specify:

- ▶ How and when your team will ask patients during their exams for private contact information.
- ▶ Which types of tests and results (e.g., normal, abnormal, positive, negative) are delivered as well as in which way.
- ▶ Which members of your practice are responsible for delivering results.
- ▶ A time frame in which results must be delivered to patients.
- ▶ How patients with positive results will receive their prescriptions or in-office treatment.

Once you've established these best practices internally, communicate with your patients so they know what to expect.

When delivering positive results, it's important to treat young adult patients with respect. Be prepared to explain treatment options, answer questions, and schedule follow-up appointments with patients during this call.

## Retesting After 3 Months

Several studies support the efficacy of patient reminders to improve retesting rates.<sup>2</sup> The CDC recommends retesting patients who test positive for CT/NG three months after treatment to assess for reinfection.<sup>3</sup> You can set up follow-up appointment reminders using your EMR system or other scheduling system and alert patients via text message, email, or a phone call.

**References:** **1.** Guttmacher Institute. An Overview of Minor's Consent Law. <https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/overview-minors-consent-law>. Updated February 1, 2023. Accessed March 1, 2023. **2.** California Department of Public Health. Best Practices and Early Detection of Repeat Chlamydial and Gonococcal Infections: Effective Partner Treatment and Patient Retesting Strategies for Implementation in California Health Care Settings. [https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Best\\_Practices\\_for\\_Preventing\\_RepeatCT\\_Inf.pdf](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/Best_Practices_for_Preventing_RepeatCT_Inf.pdf). Revised February 2016. Accessed February 28, 2023. **3.** CDC. Screening Recommendations and Considerations Referenced in Treatment Guidelines and Original Sources. <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment-guidelines/screening-recommendations.htm>. Updated June 6, 2022. Accessed February 23, 2023.

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